

ONE

Magnolia Crescent, Little Whinging

Surrey

Moon, stars, and streetlamps burst back into life. A warm breeze swept the alleyway. Trees rustled in neighboring gardens and the mundane rumble of cars in Magnolia Crescent filled the air again. Harry stood quite still, all his senses vibrating, taking in the abrupt return to normality. After a moment he became aware that his T-shirt was sticking to him; he was drenched in sweat.

He could not believe what had just happened. Dementors here, in Little Whinging...

Dudley lay curled up on the ground, whimpering and shaking. Harry bent down to see whether he was in a fit state to stand up, but then heard loud, running footsteps behind him; instinctively raising his wand again, he spun on his heel to face the newcomer.

Harry saw two people running towards him, both with their wands drawn and both wearing dark cloaks. If not for the fact that they are not wearing masks, Harry would have mistaken them for the same Death Eaters that he had had the displeasure of meeting less than two months ago.

Now that he can see the faces of the two men approaching him, he was also able to note that the robes that they are wearing, though as black as the ones that the Death Eaters are wearing, are subtly different. The Death Eater cloak was plain black, with nothing else on it, but these cloaks, while the same shade of black, have a crest on the left chest, just above the heart of the wearer.

The two men paused as they looked at the incident in the alley. The first person stopped closer to Harry than his companion, who promptly turned his attention outward, wand at the ready as if he was expecting the dementors to have some sort of reinforcements coming.

The person who had stopped closer to Harry was a person that Harry recognized. Remus had been one of Harry's favorite professors in Hogwarts and, thanks to the rumored curse on the

DADA post that saw a new occupant every year, he is also Harry's favorite defense professor. It also helped that Remus had been a childhood friend of Harry's father James.

Though still quite young, Remus looked tired and rather ill; he had more graying hair than Harry had ever remembered, but he managed to smile enthusiastically and warmly at Harry.

"Sweet Merlin Harry" the defense professor commented, he seemed to take into account the mess that was left behind and the corporeal patronus that was still pacing around Harry, "But you sure did a number on them"

Harry nodded; he motioned for his professor to help him with his cousin, but before Remus can reply, the other man, in a strangely youthful sounding voice, said, "Remus, we do not have time"

"We cannot leave his cousin behind Al" Remus replied to his companion, he glanced towards Dudley and added, "I would have wanted nothing more but to leave him here with a bloody new memory, but we need to be responsible here"

The man that Remus called Al turned towards Dudley, allowing Harry the time to study his features. He was a tall man, taller than Remus, but he was obviously younger-looking. It did not help that Remus has graying hairs, while this man had a deeply intense black hair that is the same hue as Harry's. His eyes are black, though, and he is not wearing glasses.

The man approached Dudley and inspected him, "Shock" he said, "No other external injuries" he looked at Remus and announced, "I can send him over to his bed with new memories, save young Harry here the time to return to those awful relations of his"

Remus looked first at the man called Al, and then at Harry, with a questioning look. Upon seeing the questioning gaze of his professor upon him, Harry nodded, indicating that he would want that.

The man called Al nodded once, he pointed his wand at Dudley, but he did not say anything or move his wand about, he just pointed out, and with a tiny, barely audible pop, Dudley disappeared.

"That takes care of that" the man called Al said, he looked at Harry and smiled at him, before looking at Remus and announcing, "I see what you meant when you told me that I would recognize him, Remus" he said, he smiled at Harry and the young wizard can feel the genuine warmth and enthusiasm in that smile, something that Harry is not used to when a person smiles at him, "He looks exact like James"

"Excuse me" Harry began, looking at the man called Al, "how exactly do you...."

Remus cut him off, "Not here, Harry" he said, he glanced about and said, "Too unsecured, we can talk about this in a much more secured location" he reached into his cloak and pulled out a pewter key which he promptly handed to Harry, "Take this, point your wand in it and say 'Potter Manor', and we'll see you in a bit" Remus smiled at Harry and added, "Sirius is waiting for you at the other side Harry, tell him that we are coming shortly"

Harry nodded, he took the key from Remus, and then did as he instructed. It took two seconds after he stated his destination, but after those two seconds, there was another barely audible pop before Harry disappeared, leaving just Remus and the man called Al on the alley.

Once Harry was gone, Remus looked at his partner and asked, "I don't suppose that you can find evidence in here that would prove that Harry was attacked by Dementors?"

The man called Al actually laughed as he shook his head, "That patronus was powerful, Remus, if he had continued his attack, those buggers would be dead even before they knew what hit them," and then he stopped laughing and continued in a more serious tone, "I doubt that we would find anything, but all the same, let's take position and see if the idiot ministry is actually going to make an appearance"

Potter Manor

Location Unknown

Harry popped into existence in the middle of a location that he had never seen before. As soon as he got his bearings straight, he

looked around him, and found himself in a rather large living room, complete with three sofas arranged around a rather large glass table. A nice and comfy looking fireplace was burning to the side of one of the sofas, warming the room, while on the on the far wall of the only side of the table where there was no sofa hanged a rather large television set.

On either side of the hanging television, Harry espied two pointed arches that must be at least nine feet high. From one of those arches, specifically, the one to the right of Harry walked a figure that Harry was missing since his return to Privet Drive.

"Sirius!" Harry yelled.

Sirius Black smiled at the young man in front of him. This was, after all, the young man that he had nearly given his life for, and not for the first time since he was released on his own recognizance from Azkaban prison, he wondered how his, and Harry's, life would have been different had he not lost his temper and went after Peter.

"Hey pup" Sirius said, greeting his godson, he was wearing a rather ridiculous white oversee cap over his head and had a white apron that was three times his size covering his shirt, he was holding a bowl on one of his hands and what looks to be an eggbeater on the other. It was not far fetched to claim that the wanted criminal who has been accused of killing thirteen men with one curse was actually trying to cook dinner.

With a smile, Sirius handed the bowl to a house-elf that suddenly popped beside him, instructing the creature to make sure that the other elves follow the instructions on the book, before Sirius removed the apron and the ridiculous oversee cap that he was wearing, "I found this great book while I was out shopping this morning, Harry" Sirius explained, "It had this great pictures of food in it and then the writer of the book assures me that I can do it as well when I read it, so I decided to buy it and see for myself"

Harry smiled, "It's called a cookbook Sirius" Harry replied, he motioned for one of the seats and silently asked permission if he can sit down.

Sirius looked at him and rolled his eyes, before realizing that Harry still has no idea where he is, he smiled at his godson and then said,

"Harry, I think that I should be the one asking permission" and at the blank look on the face of his godson, Sirius said, "This is Potter manor, Harry" he announced, while pointing at a crest that was hanging above the television.

Harry had missed the crest a while ago, but now that someone is pointing it at him, he saw it.

The first thing that Harry noted about the crest were the words that were engraved on the bottom of it, 'Honor Clarissima Gemma', and then the words engraved upon them on the top part of the crest, 'The Noble and Most Ancient House of Potter'.

The crest itself was a shield that appears to be held by two creatures. On the right, Harry saw a white unicorn, while on the left, there was a golden lion. On top of the shield itself, there was another golden lion, but unlike the lion that was holding the shield, the lion on top has wings, making it a griffin. The shield itself was black, with an orange X crossing from one side to the other. In the middle of the orange X were five red roses, with the third rose set on the middle of the X.

Sirius nodded, "The Potter family crest" he explained, he smiled as Harry took a seat on one of the sofas. At that moment, there were two audible pops and the two men that had rescued Harry earlier this evening, Remus and the man called Al appeared on the room.

Al noted that Harry was already sitting, but since Sirius was still standing, he correctly surmised that Sirius had not yet begun the briefing.

"Lord Potter" the man called Al said, looking at Harry and bowing towards him, then he dropped to one knee before him and continued, "My Lord, I am Sir Alvin Charles York" he glanced at both Sirius and Remus, both of whom had taken their seats and are now sniggering at the display being shown by the third man, and then scowled.

Before Alvin York can say anything else, however, Harry said, "Okay, Sir York, I do not really like it when people kneel on one leg before me, and please call me Harry"

"My Lord..." Al started to protest.

"Can it, Al" Sirius said, "I told you that he would not like it" he motioned for Al to take a seat on the other sofa since he and Remus had already taken the other one and Harry had taken the other one, before saying, "I think that we should do what we came here for, Al, and we cannot afford to waste time on formalities that my godson cannot stand upon"

Al actually smiled, "Padfoot" he began, "Why don't you begin the brief then?"

Sirius scowled at Al, but then he nodded and turned to Harry, "Harry" Sirius began; his gaze bore into the eyes of his godson as he continued, "Have you ever wondered why Voldemort wanted to kill you while you were a child? Ever asked Dumbledore about it?"

Harry cannot help but notice how Al, and even Remus, scowl at the mention of the name of the headmaster of Hogwarts. Even when Sirius said his name, there was a healthy lack of respect when he did so.

Harry shook his head, answering the first question, and then he added, "After the debacle at the Third Floor Corridor during my First Year, I tried to ask Dumbledore why Voldemort wanted to kill me, he told me that I am not yet ready to know the answer"

"My Lord...." Al began, but then he smiled and shook his head, amending his address to "Harry" he paused for a few moments, as if he was getting accustomed to the use of the name, before adding, "Before you were born, there was a prophecy made regarding you, and Voldemort thought that he was fulfilling it when he attacked you that night" he sighed once and then added, "Have you taken divination?"

Harry nodded, "It's rubbish though" he said, "All we do is attempt to read tea leaves and then look at the stars"

Al actually laughed, "I would not have expected anything else from a hag" he replied, he looked at Harry and said, "Sibyll Trewlany is actually my cousin, albeit very far. His mother married my father's cousin" he shook his head and then added, "Am I to assume that you never even got to know that there are two kinds of prophecy?"

"I did not even know that there are classifications" Harry replied, he looked at Al and said, "As I had said, the only thing we do is read tea leaves, the ones who die the most painful deaths get the best grades when she checks the dream diaries that she gave us as our home works"

Al scowled, he glanced at the direction of the two marauders, and then back at Harry, "Harry" he began, he paused once again, it was clear that he was still trying to get used to using the name, and he is pushing himself by repeatedly using his name, "The two kinds of prophecy are the real prophecy and the self-fulfilling" he looked at Harry, who nodded, indicating that he, Al, should continue, "Real prophecies are so rare, in the last one thousand years or so, there had only been five, out of a total of the recorded eighty nine thousand plus prophecies that are reportedly stored in the Department of Mysteries all around the world.'

"Self-fulfilling prophecies Harry" Remus said, getting back to the discussion, "require a bit of action, usually, from the ones that are involved in it"

"And this prophecy that involves me is self-fulfilling?" Harry asked. He wished for a glass of water, and all of a sudden, four glasses appeared on the table in front of them. Harry picked one up, drained it and then returned it to the table, only for it to be instantly replaced by a new glass that is again filled with water.

"Yes" Remus replied, he sighed and then said, "It basically said that the one that would vanquish Voldemort is approaching, that he would have powers that Voldemort does not have, and that Voldemort would mark him as his equal. It went on to say that one of the two, the person being referred to and Voldemort, would have to die for the other to live"

Harry nodded, "And how is this self-fulfilling?" Harry asked.

"Well, a thousand years could pass and there would be no person of the prophecy if Voldemort would not mark him" Remus said, he smiled as he saw Harry's hand shoot up to his forehead and to his scar, "that's right, Harry, if Voldemort did not attempt to kill you that night, he would not have marked his eventual destroyer"

"Then I have to fight him?" Harry asked.

Al nodded, "I am afraid, Harry" he said, "that there is no other way" he looked at Sirius and Remus who both nodded, before continuing, "We are still trying to find out why he did not die that night when his curse rebounded on him, but rest assured, that we would find out why he did not croak that night" he paused before adding, "in the meantime, we would train you in some basic magical disciplines so that when the time comes, you would not be as helpless as Voldemort and your headmaster would have wanted"

"Professor Dumbledore?" Harry asked.

Sirius nodded, "If not for Al here showing up one day, we would not have figured it out ourselves" he replied, he looked at Harry and said, "Al here descended from a family that have served your family for over sixty generations, Harry, since the time of the founding of the Potter family, his family had protected the Potter family"

Harry looked at Al with disbelief, until Al said, "I was supposed to protect Lord James" he admitted, and then he shook his head and said, "but he ordered me to protect you instead" he looked at Harry and said, "I apologize, Harry"

"You would not have been able to do anything" Harry said, he looked at Al and said, "I do not need your protection, but I could do well with your friendship"

Al looked at Harry for a few moments, and then he smiled before nodding, "So be it" he said.

"That's good" Sirius said, he looked at his godson and said, "because we do not know how many of your friends in Hogwarts are really your friends pup"

Harry was about to reach for the glass in front of him when Sirius said that, his hand stopped halfway to its destination, and he looked at Sirius, "What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Harry" Al said, "to understand this, you must first understand that the Potter family has been one of the richest and most influential families in the whole of the magical world." He paused before adding, "this is Potter Manor in Britain, it is your ancestral home, this might not be the house where the first Potter Lord was born, but this is the

land, though through the years, the Potter family had spread out all around the world"

"You are the last of your family, Harry" Remus said sadly, "Although your roots have spread out all around the world, the two great wars that have been fought at the muggle world have taken their toll on your family, most of your would-have-been grandparents were killed during the Second World War, while the rest were killed during the war against Grindelwald and Voldemort."

"All of their remaining earthly goods are now in your hands Harry" Sirius said, "We have no idea as to the real extent of your financial holdings since the goblins would only release that information to you." Al said, "Even if I am descended from a family that had served yours over the generations, I do not, nor would I wish, for that authority" he glanced at Sirius and added, "Sirius, even as your godfather, is also not privy to that information, and I would daresay that perhaps not even your father, Lord James, is aware of that"

"We have scheduled a visit to Gringotts for you to go over everything Harry" Sirius said, "in the meantime; let us return to our discussion"

Al nodded, he looked at Harry and said, "Just because we three, Remus, Sirius, and myself, have no power over your accounts, does not mean that we do not know their existence" Al explained, "Other people are not only aware that they exists, they are plotting to take it for themselves"

"Dumbledore?" Harry asked. He had made the connection after he realized that there was very little respect for the headmaster of Hogwarts between these three men.

Sirius nodded, "We think that he appointed himself as your guardian, illegally, if I might add, so that he can access his vaults" he shook his head and said, "He already has access of the Black vaults and is pulling funds left and right, ostensibly so that he can fund the Order, but that is bullshit"

"We think that he is using the funds to buy, supply, and train his own army" Al said, at the look on the face of Harry, Al added, "No, not the kind that he would use in fighting Voldemort, but rather, the kind that he would use to take power after he kills you" Al looked at Harry and added, "Lemon-Drop is aware of the prophecy, he was there

when it was made, and he is convinced that you are the only one that can take care of Voldemort, now, he cannot allow Voldemort to live, but he also cannot allow you to live and take control of your money, he needs it, more, he knows that he cannot kill Voldemort since the prophecy prevents that, and he knows that if you were to take care of Voldemort, your legend would eclipse his"

"We think that he plans to have you killed after you take care of Voldemort" Remus said, "Trial or outright assassination, we do not know"

Harry nodded, he looked at the three men, and then cleared his throat before saying, "So, let me get this straight, Dumbledore has been stealing from me because I have money and he wants me to take care of Voldemort, kill me after that, so he can use my money in peace and conquer the world?" he asked.

Sirius nodded.

"Fuck that!" Harry replied, looking at the three men in front of him. Harry might not know Al that well, but he knows Remus and Sirius, and he knows that the two men would never lie to him. He just has to accept their explanations, and besides, it made sense to his mind that the Headmaster is doing something behind his back. Some of the dealings that he, Harry, had with the Headmaster had been strange, after all, and it had started since he was in his First Year.

How Dumbledore never figured out about the Voldemort-Quirell combination was a mystery. Second year saw a monster in school that Dumbledore not only knows about, but is already aware about since he was there when the chamber was first opened, third year, how can Dumbledore agreed to have Dementors on the castle grounds when he could have easily refused them as he is headmaster, and finally, fourth year, how could the Supreme Mugwump and Head of the Wizengamot not know that the names that the Goblet of Fire would give can be vetoed if three of the five judges refuse to honor the results, but more importantly, how can Dumbledore fail to notice that his supposed 'old friend' whom he had retained to teach DADA to his pupils was actually a Death Eater in disguise?

"Dumbledore is not the only one is he?" Harry asked.

"I am afraid not" Sirius replied, he looked at Remus, and then Al, before looking back at Harry, "His number one supporters and partners in stealing from you are the Weasley's, though we are sure that the two eldest would have nothing to do with it. The twins also strike me as the kind who would not even think of making an enemy out of you"

"Ron and Ginny?" Harry asked.

Remus was the one who answered this, "Harry" he began, "The two of them stands to gain the most from betraying you" he looked straight at Harry's eyes, "We have uncovered their plan to douse you with love potions that are supposed to make you fall in love with Ginny"

Harry nodded; he sighed once and then asked, "Hermione?"

Remus shook her head, initially, Harry thought that the muggle-born witch whom he found had been the subject of most of his recent dreams would also betray him, but when Remus said, "She would never betray you willingly" Harry's heart did not just jump, it did a somersault, and would have attempted a break-dance as well, "Which is why Ronald is planning on dousing her with love potions as well"

Harry stood up, "We have to rescue her then" he said.

Al nodded, "We know, Harry" he replied, he waited until Harry was sitting down again, before adding, "She has been contacted by Ronald and she already knows that you have a hearing" at the blank look on the face of Harry, Al added, "The ministry is trying you for use of underage magic, but we can get to that later, anyway" he paused, partly to see if Harry would rather have the discussion about his coming underage magic hearing, and partly because he needed to. When Harry did not open his mouth to say anything, Al continued, "Hermione is planning on moving to the headquarters of Dumbledore's group, the Order of the Phoenix, on Friday, four days from now, we" he smiled as he indicated himself, Remus and Sirius, "are planning on surprising her and her parents tomorrow"

"Her parents?" Harry asked. It was clear that he was unsure if involving Hermione's parents is the right thing to do. He was about

to voice his opinion on the matter when he saw the gleam on the eyes of Al, which prompted him to ask, "You know her father?"

Al nodded, "Served with him for a few years with the Royal Navy" he said, "I was with the SBS, he was a flight dentist aboard HMS Hermes, he remembers me, so it would be easy for me to talk to him rather than Sirius or Remus here, but I think that you need to come just in case Hermione puts up a fight"

Harry readily agreed, "Good" Sirius said, he sighed and then stood up and said, "We leave early tomorrow, Crawley is a good five hour drive from here, and I would not put it past the Supreme Obliviator to have his men guarding Hermione by now, we may have a fight on our hands by tomorrow" he looked at Harry and said, "Your room would be shown to you by" he smiled and a familiar elf popped into view, "who else?" Sirius asked, and the elf in front of Harry suddenly began jumping up and down like a kid, "Dobby"

TWO

Crawley

England, United Kingdom

The dark gray car moved purposely through the wide two lane residential road flanked on both sides by picturesque homes with immaculately manicured lawns and their garages.

Inside the magically modified Jaguar XJ, Alvin York was careful not to exceed the residential speed limit of twenty kilometers per hour as he searched the houses on either side of him for the residence of the Grangers.

As he was doing so, he was considering the conversation that he had with Remus, Sirius Black and Harry Potter earlier this morning before he dropped them to a safe house to await his signal. They had talked about the latest ploy of the British Ministry of Magic to get Harry to trail to answer for underage magic.

Al had informed Harry that he believes that Dumbledore is behind the attack, and it is a ploy that the Old Man is using so that Harry would feel more indebted to him.

Both Remus and Black disagreed with that assessment, as they believed that Dumbledore is out of this, given the well documented hatred of the Old Man of dementors, instead, they suggested that the Ministry is doing this on their own, but the Old Man, never to miss out on an opportunity, is seeing this as a way to make Harry feel more indebted to him.

Regardless of who is behind it, however, the three men decided to let a lawyer handle the defense of Harry instead of letting Dumbledore do it for them. The choice of the lawyer had Al laughing silently towards himself; after all, he had no doubt that Anton Rosseu would want nothing more but to return to the court. Towards that end, Al had sent an owl to the Ministry early this morning before leaving for this mission, and in that letter, which Harry signed, they stated that they have a lawyer of their own who would handle the case and named Anton Rosseu as that counsel.

Shaking his head, Al banished all thoughts of the conversation that he had with Harry and the two Marauders on the far side of his mind, reminding himself that he had a mission here.

He was easily able to find the house of the Grangers, though, when he did exactly as Sirius instructed, look through the looking glass that was built in on the windshield of the car and look for shimmering people. When he sees one, follow their gaze and the house that they must be watching must be the house of the Grangers, after all, why are you going to place people in invisibility cloaks in a muggle neighborhood?

The Granger house looked almost exactly like the other houses in the area. It was a two storey house with a garage and a lawn that, while not as immaculately picked on as the lawn of their neighbors, is still functional. The house was finished in white and has a faint yellow roof, blending with the normality of the neighborhood perfectly, but Al knows that appearances can be deceiving.

Other than the fact that a witch calls that house her home, of course. Basic investigation through the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health had confirmed the earlier suspicions of Sirius in regards to the Grangers, and it had also confirmed that despite the fact that they live in a normal neighborhood, the Grangers are fairly wealthy. A white BMW 5 series parked outside the garage but within the driveway of the house seemed to confirm that.

Al briefly considered engaging the 'guards' watching the house, Al had already recognized them as members of the Order of the Phoenix, based on the records that Sirius had provided them, he had access to them since his ancestral home is used as the headquarters, and Al can name those guards easily. He, however, decided to ignore them for the time being. He would deal with them later if there is a need.

Deciding to ignore them, however, does not mean that he cannot inconvenience them, and best of all, Al knew that they would not be able to do anything about it since they are supposed to remain hidden. It just so happened that one of the guards was sitting on the sidewalk opposite the Granger house. Al decided to park the car there, and while doing so, he pointedly made sure that the car would not only block the watcher, but would also hit the watcher. As he was parking the car, he felt the side mirrors of the car hit the watcher

and he smiled gleefully to himself as he considered the pain that the watcher is now feeling.

Now parked properly, Al switched off the engine of the car and got off the vehicle, making sure that he appears as muggle as possible, though he knew that that would be easy for him since he had spent more than half of his life in the muggle world.

A few moments later found him knocking on the front door of the Grangers. The door opened to reveal a young girl with bushy brown hair and eyes the color of brown chocolates, "Yes sir?" she asked.

Al smiled at her, realizing that he may be looking at the next Lady Potter. He briefly considered kneeling before her, but then dismissed it at the same thought, for the success of this mission, Hermione Granger must not know him until the last possible moment, "Good morning ma'am" Al said, smiling at the girl in front of him and even managing a courteous bow, "I was wondering if this is the house of Robert Daniel Granger?"

Hermione Granger can sense the power of the individual in front of him, and she realized that this man is most probably a wizard. Still, he named her father, so they may be acquaintances and from what she can see, the man in front of him was as normal as one could go. She decided to answer in the affirmative, invited the stranger into the living room, and went off to call her father.

In the Granger living room, Al took note of everything. He saw the many pictures of the family and confirmed that Mr. and Mrs. Granger doted on Hermione. Most of the pictures in the living room are of the girl, and there are few other pictures where she is with other children, and in those pictures, Hermione does not look too happy, so he surmised that those pictures have been taken for the sake of formality only.

Al did not take a seat since he was not given permission to seat; instead, he stood at the living room. This turned out to be a good thing since a few moments later, Hermione, followed by her father and mother, entered the room. What surprised Al was that Hermione's hands were behind her, and from the way that those hands were positioned, Al can tell that the young witch is holding her wand.

He managed a smile, which, fortunately, Dan Granger mistook as a gesture meant for him, "Al!" the normal looking dentist said, rushing towards his old friend with his hand outstretched. Al took his hand and the two old war buddies, though Dan did not really fought in the frontlines, shook hands, "It's been what? Twelve years?"

"Closer to thirteen Dan" Al replied, he smiled at his friend, allowing his genuine emotions to run through as he cannot deny that he is happy to see the dentist who advised him that the next time that he would need to crush the shell of a nut, he should not use his teeth.

"My family" Dan said, motioning to Hermione and his wife, "I'm not sure if you've met Rose before, we were steady during the war, but I am sure that you've never met my daughter before" he smiled and shook his head, "She goes to a boarding school up in Scotland, but since its summer break, she's staying with us"

"Pleasure" Al said, he bowed to Mrs. Rosaline Emma 'Rose' Granger, and then turned towards Hermione. He smiled at her and then turned his attention back towards Dan, saying, "Dan, there is something that we need to talk about, which is why I am here, but first, I would need to ask your permission to bring in a few friends of mine"

The seriousness in the voice of his old comrade had warned Dan that he would not like what Al was about to say. He glanced at his family, and then back at Al before asking, "Should we keep this talk to ourselves Al?"

To the surprise of all the Granger's, Al shook his head, "it would be better if they hear this as well, it involves them, especially" he turned his attention to the youngest Granger, "Hermione"

Hermione wanted to confirm her suspicions that this man is a wizard, she was getting ready to use her wand, but before she can bring it to bear, her father said, "Alright, you have my permission Al"

"Thanks Dan" Al replied, and to the surprise of everyone, he pulled a wand out of the left sleeve of the black greatcoat that he was wearing, which he then flicked once, sending a signal that everyone saw.

Hermione moved to counter, she saw this man as a threat now, but before she can move, she took time to study the wand that this strange man had withdrawn from his sleeves. It was like all other wands that it was made of wood, but unlike wands that she had seen before, his wand was longer and seemed thicker.

At that moment, three figures beamed into the living room, reminding Dan Granger of Star Trek.

Upon seeing the three men who had beamed into the room, Hermione whipped her wand out and pointed at them, asking, "What was the last thing I gave Harry Potter before he went off to face Voldemort during our First Year?"

Harry smiled at her, "A hug" he replied.

Hermione nodded, she sighed to relax herself and then lowered her wand, without warning, and certainly ignoring her father, mother and all the other adults in the room, she suddenly threw herself at Harry.

She would never admit it but Hermione would have wanted to give Harry more than a hug, both today and during that time at the Third Floor Corridor, she would have wanted to kiss him, but then her Gryffindor courage failed her, that time. Right now, she cannot because her parents are there.

Al introduced the newly arrived guests to the Granger elders. Both dentists were not sure of what to make of Remus when they were told that he was a werewolf, or of Sirius when they were told that he had escaped from a maximum security prison, but when they were introduced to Harry, they suddenly paused.

Dan and Emma Granger were perplexed. They had watched as three men beam into their room, but that was something that, while they did not expect, they are prepared for, after all, their daughter was a witch, but it was more than that when they looked at Harry, it was as if a dam had broken in their minds and the waters of memories flooded into their being, it was remembering something that for some reason, both had forgotten.

Al, who had his attention at his old friend, was first to notice it. He can tell that the glossy eyes and almost blank look anywhere, for as a battle wizard, he is accustomed to using the same tactic. As soon

as the color on the eyes of both Granger parents returned, Al turned towards Dan and asked, "What do you remember?"

Those words separated Hermione from Harry, her concern for her parents that saw her ready to tackle Al back in her eyes. She looked at her father, as did Harry, as Dan Granger said, "Halloween, 1981"

Al looked at Sirius, as did Remus and Harry, just in time to see him nodding. He looked at Dan for a few moments, and then said, "When I arrived at Godric's Hallow that night, Hagrid was already there, holding Harry, but there was someone else, someone that we are sure is not magical"

"My father?" Hermione asked, looking at the three adults.

"We thought so" Sirius admitted, he looked at Dan and nodded, before turning his attention back towards Hermione, "Now we know so"

"We used to live on the coast" Emma Granger said, looking at her daughter, she lovingly added, "Hermione loved it there"

"Halloween, 1981" Dan Granger said, "I was out because our baby supplies run out" he obviously thought it better not to mention what those particular supplies were, "when I saw this light coming from an island, I felt compelled to investigate, I felt as if my daughter was calling me there, so I got on my boat and went there"

"Godric's Hallow?" Harry asked, looking at his three guardians

"Yes" Al replied, he looked at Harry and said, "Until a few moments ago, we are not sure if what Sirius had been dreaming for the past fifteen years was true, at first, Remus and I thought that it was because of the dementors" he smiled at Dan and said, "It seems that it was true after all"

"There was a destroyed house and bodies" Dan said, "and then I heard a baby cry, I looked for the child and saw a baby with the greenest eyes" he looked at Harry and confirmed it, "and a lightning shaped scar on his forehead" Harry showed him the scar.

"Dad" Hermione said, "You mean to tell me that you were there when Harry was taken by Hagrid?"

Dan Granger nodded, "More than there, princess" Dan replied, he looked at Sirius and said, "You were there as well?" when Sirius nodded, Dan continued, "I saw a man there, with the longest goatee I would ever see, and he pointed something at me and I was paralyzed" he looked at Al, "Any idea who he is?"

Al nodded, but his response of 'Lemon-Drop', was closely followed by 'Supreme Obliviator' from Sirius and 'Chief Manipulator' from Remus sowed confusion among those who do not know whom they are referring to, Harry looked at a confused Hermione, whom he noted was still holding hands with him, and smiled at her before saying, "You know him as Dumbledore, they" he indicated his three companions, "have their own nicknames for him, Sirius insists that I come up with my own as soon as possible"

Dan Granger nodded, it was clear that he failed to see the humor behind the nicknames that the three adults have used, so he just continued with his story, "The last thing I remembered was this man placing the child on the middle of the abandoned home, and then I lost consciousness, the next thing I remember, I was back at home and that's it"

Emma Granger, who had went to the kitchen to grab a couple of drinks, had now returned and filled the blanks in the story that her husband had just narrated, "Probably the same man that Dan saw on the island appeared on our front door that same day, he was carrying Dan, he pointed a wand at me and the next thing I remembered was being anxious on finally moving away from the shore." She looked at Dan and said, "Now that I remember, I was the one who insisted that we live near a beach because I love watching the setting sun there"

Al looked at Harry, by now, everyone was sitting where they can find seats. The thirty year old battle wizard sworn to defend the Potter heir noted that Harry and Hermione are not only sitting together, they are also holding hands, and from the way that they are holding hands, it was clear that they are not letting go anytime soon. Al wondered if it was the revelation that they could have lived with each other as pseudo-siblings, or if it was something else. At that moment, he suddenly remembered something, and he looked at Emma Granger, "Ma'am" Al began, he was stopped by Emma who began

insisting that she be called by her first name, "Emma" Al corrected, "May I ask why that particular beach?"

Emma seemed to think about it, and then replied after a few moments, "Well, it was a beautiful stretch" she replied, "And as I said, I loved watching the setting sun, but" she suddenly looked at Hermione, she noted the closeness of her only daughter and Harry, and then back at Al, "one of the foremost reasons was Hermione, when we passed the stretch of beach, she started crying, so Dan stopped there, she seemed happy there"

Al nodded, "May I ask if Hermione ever wanted to go to the island where Dan saw Harry?" he asked, the tone of his voice was read by everyone in the living room, and they all realized that the answer to the question is critical for something that Al is thinking about. What that something is, however, only he knows.

Emma paused to think about the answer, but she did not pause for long, she actually started laughing as she remembered, "She demanded, in a way that only one year olds can, to go to that island, but we always manage to placate her, everyday, when I take her out for a walk, she would reach out for that island,"

"And after Halloween 1981, it suddenly stopped?" Al asked.

Emma almost fearfully nodded, she realized that there was something wrong, but it was Dan who asked, "Al" he said, "What is it?" and from the look on the faces of everyone in the room, it was clear that he was the only one who knows what the hell he is talking about, since the others are also demanding an answer to the question that Dan just asked.

"Something that we can never be sure about unless we make some tests" Al said, she looked at Dan and said, "Dan, there are three guards from the Order of the Phoenix outside, and it is imperative that Harry, his godfather and Remus here must remain hidden from them," Dan nodded, "May I suggest sending Harry and Hermione somewhere for the time being?"

Dan was about to agree, from the tone of voice that his old friend had used, he got the distinct impression that whatever it is that he is about to talk about, he does not want to talk about in front of the two kids, but before he can open his mouth, Hermione said, "I demand

that we be allowed to hear this if it is something that involves me and Harry"

Harry nodded as well, and it is to him whom Al turned and implored, "Harry" he said, "I am not sure if you are ready for this"

Harry snorted, "It doesn't matter isn't it Al?" he asked sarcastically, the teenager decided to use the words that Al had used against himself, "Things happen when you are the least ready for it after all,"

Al sighed, he looked towards his two companions and found them laughing at him, and then back at Harry and nodded, "Very well" he replied, he looked at Dan and Emma, who both have no choice, seeing the look on the face of their daughter, in the matter and nodded their permission for Hermione to stay as well.

"Harry, Hermione" Al said, and then he looked at Hermione's parents, "Dan, Emma, what I am about to tell you is something that only the closest friends of the Potter family is aware of, as a York, I am privileged to hear this information because we require it to protect the future of the Potter family"

"Shit" Sirius suddenly said, he recognized the phrase that Al had used. As for Remus, he was not able to say anything because at that moment, he dropped the cup that he was about to drink from. A quick repair charm and cleaning charm later, he looked at Al with disbelief written in his face.

Al nodded, he looked at the two Granger parents and said, "The Potter male heirs are always powerful, and their magic, always know when their future is near" at the confused expression on the face of his old friend and his wife, Al decided to simplify things a bit, "What I am saying is that the Potter male heirs always know when the girl who would most likely be their wife is close to them" he paused for a few moments to look at Dan and Emma, both nodded and was about to ask a question, but before they can do so, Al added, "this ability, however" he said, "is not unique to the male heirs alone, their future wives also feel it" he turned towards Hermione, it was a good thing that her parents are temporarily stunned by what Al had just said, and asked, "If I may? When you first met Harry, what did you feel? Magically, physically, mentally and emotionally?"

"Al, I was an ass when we first met" Harry complained, but Al ignored him for the time being, he was focused on knowing the answer of Hermione to his question.

Hermione paused for a few moments to remember what she felt that day on the train, she had to mentally banish the thought of Ronald Weasley impliedly insulting her, and for a few moments, Al was worried that her parents might interfere, but a quick look at the two dentists showed that they too are anxious to know the answer.

Hermione sighed, "When I first met Harry that day, I felt something tugging at me that I could never name, I now know that as my magic, and when I think about it, I can say that I am feeling magically..." she searched for a word, "compelled?" she tried, but then shook her head, "that would imply that I would have no choice, but see, I did have a choice, seeing that I left them a few moments later."

Al nodded, he gave the impression that that was exactly the phrase that he was looking for, he looked at her and her parents and said, "Hermione's magic recognized Harry's, much as, I believe, it had recognized Harry all those years ago before you left that house, their magic had made a connection" Al looked at Sirius and Remus and said, "I would say that that is enough, but then again, most magical couples do feel the same way when they meet their spouses, so we cannot be sure if that is what we are looking for" he looked at Hermione and asked, "Physically?"

Hermione replied, "it was hard to get away from him after meeting him" she replied, "At first, I thought it was because he was famous or something, but it wasn't that"

"Your magic is interfering with your physical capabilities because it has already recognized Harry" Al said, "whether or not as your future spouse is still debatable, but I think we are heading there" his statement brought a smile on the face of both Harry and Hermione, "mentally?"

"I had to be with him" Hermione answered instantly, "there was no other consideration, I had to be with him and that's it"

"You left remember?" Harry asked.

"That was because of a certain red haired boy" Hermione replied playfully, lightly pinching Harry's face with her hand, "And emotionally, I felt as if all my emotions are about to break then and there, I felt as if I wanted to laugh, cry and be angry at the same time"

Al looked at Sirius and Remus who both nodded. Al was about to turn to explain to Dan and Emma, but Sirius interfered, he turned towards Al and asked, "How long did you think?"

Al smiled, "Emma had already provided us with the answer to that one" he replied.

Remus blinked, "Since birth?" he asked.

Al shook his head, "Since they passed by the island" he replied, he sighed and then turned towards the Granger elders, Harry and Hermione, before announcing, "Everything that Hermione had said corresponds exactly to what Lady Lily had told me when he first met Lord James" he said, "And we know for a fact that Lord James and Lady Lily are soul-bound" he seemed excited as he added, "Lord James and Lady Lily bound when they first met, eleven years old on the train to Hogwarts, Sirius, I believe was there?"

Sirius nodded, he looked at his godson and said, "If they had bound since the time as Al claimed..."

"A powerfully bound couple" Remus concluded, "No wonder"

"So?" Harry asked, anxious to know the answer.

Al, as did Sirius and Remus nodded, but it was Remus who said, "Harry, Hermione, you are soul-bound, and judging from the time that you had been bound, a very, very powerful one"

THREE

Granger Residence, Crawley

England, United Kingdom

Harry had expected Hermione to be angry with him with this bit of news, he had expected her to scream at him on the top of her lungs, so he was pleasantly surprised when, while Hermione is still screaming, her screams are not directed at him, more, her screams are actually broadcasting the fact that she was happy with this bit of news.

Harry turned towards Hermione's parents and saw the two of them eyeing all their guests cautiously, he opened his mouth to explain, even if he himself does not have any inclination of what a soul-bond is, but at the moment that he was about to push the words out of his mouth, he suddenly found himself looking at Hermione.

Harry cannot tell exactly what he is seeing. He was looking at the most beautiful pair of brown eyes that he had ever seen, that the owner of this pair of eyes was the girl that he had been dreaming about since they first met, and that the owner of this pair of eyes is apparently a girl with whom he is now bound notwithstanding.

As for Hermione, she was the one who placed her hand on Harry's chin, gently compelling him using what little strength that she has to look at her. That she was able to do so with the little strength that she possessed was a tell-tale sign that Harry wanted it as well.

She found herself looking at a pair of eyes, their color as the greenest that she had ever seen, and she knew that she could lose herself there, and she found it strangely amusing and comforting at the same time.

Both Harry and Hermione would never know who it was the first move to kiss the other. Both would have claimed that it was her or him who did so. In reality, it might be that the two of them moved at the same time, for they met halfway there and shared a kiss.

Both of them reveled at the feeling of their first kiss.

For Harry, who has never been kissed before, kissing Hermione was like drinking the best pepper-up potion in the world, and at the same time, it was like drinking an energy depleting potion. That was how he felt, that he was getting weak on her knees, but at the same time, that he was feeling stronger.

For Hermione, who had been kissed before by her parents, though at her cheeks, it was a different experience than those kisses that her parents had given her. Certainly, she would have made the same analogy that Harry had used should she be asked to describe how she felt, but for her right now, it felt as if they were eleven years old again, and she felt as if time could stop here and now, she would not care.

Dan and Emma looked at one another, in reality, Dan wanted to stand up and forcibly separate his daughter from Harry, but he found himself being pinned on the sofa. It was not any of the magical beings that are now with them who is doing the pinning, all three of them were stunned more effectively than any stunner that had been fired before at the kiss that Harry and Hermione are now sharing. The reason that Dan was looking at his wife was because he felt her gripping the back of the white dentist coat that he was wearing.

Emma Granger was pointing at her daughter while she was kissing Harry. Dan looked at their daughter, and his eyes widened when he saw that the couple, Harry and Hermione, are now surrounded by a golden white nimbus of light that is getting stronger and stronger as time passes.

Al, Sirius and Remus, stunned as they are, noted the golden white nimbus of light that is now surrounding the couple. None of the three men are witnessing their first ever soul bond, but none of the three men have ever been witness to a golden white nimbus of light surrounding a soul-bonded couple as bright as this before.

Sirius and Remus are also remembering the first time that they had watched something like this. It was during their seventh year at Hogwarts, when James got lucky and was able to share his first kiss with Lily at the common room at Gryffindor Tower, the light was as powerful as the light of a stunner and they held lips for a full minute before they separated. Since that time, the two of them have been inseparable.

As for Al, he was remembering the first time that he witnessed something like this. He noticed his first when he was fairly young, before the war, when he witnessed a buddy of his kissing his girlfriend before shipping out. The couple was muggle, but that did not stop their souls from binding with one another, love, after all, is the one kind of magic that all people share.

Watching as Harry and Hermione shared their kiss, Remus and Sirius decided to time the actual deed. For some reason, both men think that they would hold their kiss longer than the full minute that James and Lily had when their souls first bound with one another.

The power of the light that is surrounding the couple is growing more intense with each passing second and all of the adults in the room now cannot help but shield their eyes from the intense light. Suddenly, the light disappeared all together, but one glance at Harry and Hermione by Al confirmed that they are still holding their kiss. That was the last thing that he can remember, because at that moment, a wave of powerful magic erupted from the couple like a wave, knocking out Al, Remus, and Sirius. Due to their proximity, both Dan and Emma were knocked out as well. The magical backlash shot out in all direction, discarding the walls of the Granger house, and went on to knock out every magical being that they come across, including the guards on the Granger Residence.

Department of Magical Regulation

Ministry of Magic, London, England

At the ministry, devices that are used to monitor illegal magic suddenly decided to all go off at once. The person in charge of monitoring them was a lucky bastard, as he had never seen this happen before, so he decided to leave the room and call for his supervisor. At the same time that he closed the door to run for his supervisor, every device shattered into a thousand pieces, sending lethal projectiles everywhere.

If the man who was supposed to be monitoring them had waited for his supervisor instead, he would be dead.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

If Albus Dumbledore had been in his office that morning, he would be howling mad.

His office has a collection of silver instruments on a flat surface, and as soon as the magical backlash reached Hogwarts, these instruments were the first to go off. At first, they started to twirl and complain like crazy; sending high shrill sounds into the air, but after a few moments, when it was clear that the device were being forced to accept too much power, they just started to explode.

The occupants of the portraits in the office were the only ones that had witnessed the phenomena, but because the devices exploded, millions of silver pieces started to fly everywhere, destroying more than half of the portraits in the office.

All around England

The magical shockwave soon covered all of England. As it did, it passed several items of interests, which includes a cup, a locket, and a ring.

As the magical shockwave passed through them, they suddenly emitted painful screaming, followed by some sort of black spirit being expelled from the things and then deafening silence.

Malfoy Manor

London, England

The magical shockwave passed through the beautiful and obviously expensive manor much like how it has passed through the other manors in the area.

Lord Voldemort was in a meeting with his inner circle, the moment that the shockwave hit the place, every witch and wizard in the area suddenly found themselves kissing the ground, and in the case of one death eater who was unluckily conducting business in the comfort room, he suddenly found himself kissing his bodily wastes right after he had deposited it.

The ones most affected were Voldemort himself and his snake.

In the case of the self-styled Dark Lord, he was walking along the stairs, he likes to walk every time he is making a speech, when the shockwave hit. The magical shockwave knocked him out, and unfortunately for him, his foot slipped and he found himself not only kissing the ground, he found himself kissing the ground with two broken limbs, an arm that is set in an unnatural angle and a bleeding wound on his head. Since all of his followers are down with him, and would not recover for another hour, no one can help him until then.

As for the snake, it reacted much like the three other items, but in the case of the snake, there was no deafening silence after the black spirit was exorcised. It was a good thing that the death eaters and Voldemort are down, if not, then they would be getting front row seats as they watch the snake explode.

Granger Residence, Crawley

England, United Kingdom

Al was the first one up, followed by Sirius Remus and Dan. Emma was the last one before Harry and Hermione.

All occupants of the house looked at each other, unsure of what just happened, that was, until Sirius started to laugh, followed closely by Remus and then Al.

"Okay" Harry said, he was still holding Hermione's hand, "Someone tell me what the hell just happened"

Al sighed, he was smiling as he said, "We just found proof that you and Hermione are indeed soul-bound" he looked at Hermione and bowed to her, and in a slightly amused tone, he asked, "Should I address you as Lady Hermione from now on, or would Hermione suffice?"

Hermione smiled, she does not know what the hell just happened, but she felt, there was no other way to describe it, complete for the first time since she was born. Looking at Harry, she was sure that he feels the exact same way, and when he looked at her, she suddenly realized that what he is feeling is the exact same thing that she is feeling, for the first time since both of them were born, they felt complete.

"Hermione would suffice, Al" Hermione replied, she smiled mischievously, "Assuming, of course, that I can call you Al"

"Of course" Al replied with a smirk on his face, he then turned his attention towards Dan and Emma, he sighed before saying, "I am sorry about this Dan, but you now have no choice but to come with us"

Dan nodded, he looked at Emma, who nodded, before turning his attention back towards his old friend and nodding, "You said that there are guards out there, how do we go out?" he asked.

Al smiled, "Simple Dan" Al replied, "Your old friend is going to treat you and your family to dinner, so, how about it old buddy?"

Dan smiled and shook his head, "As long as you're paying, I really do not mind." He looked at him and asked, "How does that help?"

Remus was the one who answered, "Harry, Sirius and I are not supposed to be here Dan" he said, "We would leave the way we came, but before we do, we would help you pack first, then shrink your things so that it would fit in a single suitcase"

"Which you would bring with you guys when you leave for dinner tonight" Al said, he looked around the house and said, "I am sorry that I am asking you to leave this place, Dan, I can see that you and your family love this place, but..."

"Hermione had informed us of the danger that we are in, Al" Dan replied, "We were thinking of selling this place anyway, and as for the practice, it has become tediously boring and repetitive, so that would be no loss"

Al nodded, "Okay" he replied, he smiled and asked, "Shall we then?"

The Burrow, Weasley Home

Devon, England

Albus Dumbledore sat on the round table filled with the cooking of Molly Weasley, aware that the money that the Weasley matriarch had used to buy all the ingredients for this feast had come from the Potter vault.

With him at the table was the Weasley patriarch, who was looking subdued, as usual, the two youngest Weasley siblings and the spy of Albus Dumbledore in the ministry, Percival Weasley.

The twins, Fred and George, are out of the house since they had been given permission by Molly to visit their friend Lee Jordan, while the two eldest Weasley brothers, Bill and Charlie, are out of the country, in Egypt and Romania respectively, for their jobs. That suited Dumbledore just fine since the ones that were not included in this meeting are the ones that are not in on the plan. More, Albus is sure that the ones that are not included in this meeting are the ones who would not want anything to do with the plan.

Glancing at Arthur, who was obediently eating his dinner, Dumbledore cannot help but feel sorry for him. He had been under the Imperius curse for nearly thirty years now, and had been fed more than enough love potions that made him addicted to it, but the self-styled 'Leader of Light' consoled himself by convincing himself that everything that they are doing is for the 'Greater Good'

Arthur was just unlucky enough to have been the one that Molly Prewett had chosen as her husband when Dumbledore asked her to choose for the fulfillment of their plan.

Glancing to the boy sitting beside his father, Dumbledore saw Percival Weasley. The former Hogwarts Head Boy was sorted into Gryffindor only because of the fact that he had red hair. If not for that fact, everyone in the table would be prepared to bet that Percy would have been sent to Slytherin. He was devious, cunning and would not hesitate to sacrifice his own family for his advancement, traits that made him ideal as the Dumbledore spy inside the Ministry. A staged fight between father and son in Diagon Alley was all that was needed to make the idiot that is the Minister believe that Percy is loyal to him rather than Dumbledore.

On the other side of Arthur was an empty seat, which was meant for Molly. The Weasley matriarch was currently putting the finishing touches on her main course, so she was out on the kitchen, and then Dumbledore. To the other side of Dumbledore are three empty seats, before his eyes rested on the pretty little red head of Ginevra Weasley.

The youngest of the Weasley siblings used to be a kind-hearted girl who would never do what she is doing to Harry now. Dumbledore remembered when she was a child, Ginny was an incredibly smart girl who knew that they are poor, so she kept asking where they are getting the money to buy her things. Growing up in a household under the iron control of Molly Weasley soon saw that kind attitude for the girl go away. She is probably the one who depends on the Potter vault the most, and she consoles herself every night by convincing herself that when she marries Harry, they would be sharing that vault anyway.

Dumbledore again consoled himself as he thought about how different the life of Ginevra Weasley had turned out by telling himself that all of this is for the Greater Good.

Sitting beside her young sister was the youngest Weasley boy. Unlike Ginevra, who had become the person that she is now because of how she was raised, Ronald was born jealous. Stifling a chuckle, Dumbledore remembered how the one day old Ronald, seeing that his blanket was shabby, actually stole the blanket of the baby beside him so that he can use it, and did not care that the other babies crying woke the entire nursery up, while he slept.

Dumbledore need not console himself for the youngest Weasley since he had been born like that. Ronald, however, is also a good actor, so much that he might actually win the muggle Academy Award for Best Actor, and he is the same age as Harry Potter, which made him the best man to plant beside the young Potter heir. Dumbledore knew that the boy, starved of friendship and affection, would instantly trust Ronald without knowing that the boy would happily murder him so that he can get his money.

At that moment, Molly entered the dinning room, a platter full of chopped roast chicken between her two hands. As the Weasley matriarch placed the platter at the center of the table, Dumbledore studied her. Molly could easily become the potions mistress of Hogwarts if she ever needed a job. Like most pureblood supremacist, however, she believed that the place of a woman is in her house, serving her husband and raising her children. That she had to use a love potion and subsequently impregnated her husband to enforce this fantasy of hers is of little consequence to the pureblood.

At the moment that Dumbledore was about to tear off the legs of the roast chicken in front of him, an owl flew into the room and dropped a letter off for Percy, who quickly snatched it and grudgingly paid the delivery owl. No one noted that the owl glanced at the sumptuous feast before it flew away, everyone was staring at Percy, who opened the letter with a feeling of dread.

He had expected the letter to be some sort of notice from the minister who had discovered who he was working for, so when he saw that it was from, Matthias Plod, their spy inside the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Percy cannot help but sigh. His good mood, however, instantly banished after he read the note and handed it to Professor Dumbledore.

Dumbledore read the letter three times, trying to decide as he was doing so if the letter was a joke, but decided that, since it came from a well-placed spy inside the ministry, it cannot be a joke.

Dumbledore handed the paper to Molly, who read out loud, "Potter has chosen a defense counsel for his case, the celebrated German lawyer, Anton Rosseu, who has a license with our ministry, to defend him in the coming trial. Madam Bones and Minister Fudge both agreed with the choice, though reluctantly in the case of the latter" she turned to Dumbledore and asked, "Who is this Anton Rosseu, Albus, and why is he defending Harry?"

Percy answered for the professor, who was clearly perplexed at this strange turn out of events, "Anton Rosseu is a German Lawyer as the paper said mom" he explained, "he is a hard hitter and one who has never lost a case before"

"So?" Ron asked, as typical of him, he asked the question while his mouth was full of food, resulting to some of his food flying off his mouth, and since he looked at his brother as he asked the question, some food found their way on Percy's clothes, who looked at his brother irritably before banishing the food back to Ron, who not only did not care, but actually scooped the pieces from his clothes and promptly returned them to his mouth.

"It does not matter" Dumbledore suddenly said, he actually smiled and said, "When Harry comes to Headquarters, I would convince him to drop Rosseu and allow me to handle his case"

No one in the table, not even the imperiused Arthur Weasley, would doubt that Dumbledore would be able to change Harry's mind, after all, Dumbledore is the most powerful wizard in the world, and his memory charms are the stuff of legend. Those charms would probably have books written about them by now, if not for the fact that Dumbledore would not hesitate to use them to hide his manipulations.

"Why can't we let him stew with his muggle relations?" Ron asked.

"Because Ron" Ginny said, turning towards her brother, "I need him near so that I can seduce him" she gave her brother a look that suggested to everyone in the table that she thinks that his brother is stupid, which, unfortunately, is shared by a majority of the occupants of the table, "the love potion is nearly complete, I would just need to add the final ingredient tonight and by tomorrow, I would be leading Harry by the nose"

Dumbledore noted, impressed with the youngest Weasley child. He silently smiled as he considered offering Ginny the job of potions mistress at Hogwarts after Severus retires, for, if anything, it seems that Ginny is better than her mother when it comes to potions.

"Ronald" Dumbledore suddenly said, "When you arrive at Headquarters tonight, I want you to prepare to snag young Miss Granger as well"

Ron looked at the professor as if he was mad, and then asked, "Why should I get the mudblood, Professor?" he asked, he looked at his mother, noted the anger on the face of his father as he used the word mudblood, but ignored him, and asked, "Ginny gets Potter, why do I get the mudblood?"

"Ronald" Dumbledore said, placating the youngest Weasley boy, "She would get in the way of Ginevra, we cannot have that"

"Besides" Ginny added, "You need her since she is the only one who can do your homework"

"Well, there is that" Ron admitted, he sighed once and then nodded, though it was clear that he was not liking his new mission one bit. He, however, reminded himself that a successful mission is going to be rewarded, and he cannot wait to get his reward on this one.

Befriending Potter gave him ten thousand galleons, for taking Granger, he intends to ask for a reward of no less than one hundred thousand galleons.

Dumbledore smiled as he read the mind of the Weasley boy, and he was more than prepared to give him what he wants, the money, after all, is going to come from the vaults of Harry.

The conversation had mostly died down by now, as the occupants of the table turned their attention to the feast that Molly has prepared. Whatever else may be said of the Weasley matriarch, most of them not good, no one can deny her cooking skills.

Unfortunately, at that moment, another post owl decided to make an appearance. This time, however, the owl did not go to Percy, instead, it went straight to Dumbledore, who then removed the letter and offered the owl some food. The owl seemed to look around, saw Molly Weasley, and had the primeval instinct to get the hell out of anything that the woman had cooked, so the owl decided to forego the usual knut as well and just flew away as soon as the owl was certain that the letter has been delivered.

No one at the table, not even Dumbledore, can explain the unusual behavior of the owl, but then again, they did not have the time to do so, because at that moment, Dumbledore opened his letter, and saw contents that would have angered the wizard if not for the fact that he was supposed to be at a table.

The note fell but Percy was quick enough to summon it to him so that he can read it. There are only a few words in the letter and Percy saw that it was delivered from the home of Arabella Figg, the 'guardian' of Harry at his relatives place, and the letter was about Harry. What was written, however, was not something that anyone in the table, with perhaps the exception of Arthur Weasley, would have expected.

The letter simply stated: 'Harry is gone, not been seen since yesterday afternoon, muggle relatives are trying to keep it a secret, but not doing well'

A/N: Apparently, the original draft of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone has Harry being rescued from the destroyed house by Hermione's dad.

FOUR

Gringotts Bank, Diagon Alley

London, England

Harry, Hermione, Dan and Emma Granger, as well as Remus and Al walked purposely towards the large white building located at a convenient location in Diagon Alley.

Harry and Hermione are holding hands and leading the party. Both were wearing the casual clothes, in the case of Harry, this was a short-sleeved green dress shirt and black dress pants with a black belt and the same color leather shoes, while for Hermione, this was a light pink blouse and jeans with white rubber shoes.

Behind them are Dan and Emma, both wearing the same casual clothes as Harry and Hermione, which, for Dan's case was a blue short sleeved dress shirt, light brown slacks with brown belt and brown leather shoes, and for Emma, this was a light green blouse and jeans with white rubber shoes.

Due to the nature of their dress, since they are the only ones who are wearing what can be classified as 'muggle' in the alley, almost every person that they pass turns their attention towards them.

Bringing the rear of the party was a smiling Al and a worried looking Remus. Both were wearing muggle clothes that can be classified as acceptable in the magical world. Both men were wearing black greatcoats that reach up to their knees, and matching black dress pants.

In the case of Al, he was also wearing a sword, with a baldric that hung from his right shoulder to his left hip from where what appears to be a goblin forged sword hung.

Remus, however, was a surprise. Harry and Hermione are used to seeing their professor wearing threadbare and patched-up clothes, but the clothes that he was wearing today, while not new looking, looks well kept.

The party was heading towards Gringotts so that Harry can take control of the fortunes of his family. After being told by Harry, Remus,

Sirius and Al, Hermione and her parents have insisted that Harry should take control so as to stop the thefts from his family.

At the huge double doors that mark the main entrance to the Gringotts Bank, two goblins, both wearing armor and carrying long spears, bowed towards them. This was the first time that a goblin had bowed to Harry as he was visiting the bank, though he would admit that he had only visited the bank once, so it raised eyebrows.

He, however, did not deign to ask the goblins why they are bowing to him, because for all he knows, they, the goblins, might be bowing to someone else. a quick glance at Al confirmed that the battle wizard had sensed his anxiety in regards to that action and that the battle wizard would explain it as soon as he is able.

Upon entering the bank, Harry paused, he can see that the bank is busy, with almost all of the goblins behind the counters entertaining customers. He gazed across the hall, looking for a free goblin, and spotted one at the far end of the hall. Harry nudged Hermione lightly, diverting her attention towards the goblin who was free, and she nodded, but they had barely taken a step towards the free goblin when another one approached them.

This goblin bowed towards the party and then said, "Greetings, Harry Potter, I am Scarface, personal assistant to Senior Manager Grimfist"

Harry inclined his head slightly towards the Goblin. He might be asleep ninety five percent of the time when they were having History of Magic, but he is not stupid enough to forget his manners when dealing with a goblin. Looking at Scarface, Harry saw that the goblin was unarmed, but that does not mean that the goblin guards are not, and besides, it was common courtesy to return a greeting, "Greetings, Scarface" Harry replied, and he was followed in kind by his companion.

"It has been a long time Scarface" Al said, after he greeted the said goblin, he smiled towards the goblin, who grinned back, before asking, "I trust that you and yours are well?"

"Very well, my Lord Alvin" Scarface replied, the use of the honorific confusing everyone in the party save for Remus, who managed to snigger.

Al nodded, while Scarface turned his attention back towards Harry, "Harry Potter, Senior Manager Grimfist is waiting for us at his office, and he had sent me to guide you so that you may find his office faster, may I take you there?"

Beside Harry, Hermione gasped as the indications of what the goblin had said hit home. Harry turned towards her, intent on asking her for an explanation, but she shook her head and gave him a look that basically said 'I'll explain on the way there', so Harry was forced to look at the goblin and nodded.

Scarface led Harry, Hermione and their companions up three flights of stairs that are polished with marble, and past three halls that are as wide as the main hall on the ground floor of the bank, save that instead of counters, this hall has rooms. As they walked, Hermione told Harry, "Only the oldest and wealthiest of all families in the Magical world have their own account managers" she explained.

Behind them, Al added to the explanation, though his explanation was meant for the three Grangers and Harry, "The Potter family" he said, "is one of the wealthiest, if not the wealthiest, in the whole magical world"

By the time that they reached the office of the account manager, Harry and Hermione's parents are already well aware of the implications of meeting a senior manager.

Scarface knocked three times on the door before he opened it and respectfully allowed Harry and his companions' entry. Harry stepped into the office first, followed by Hermione, and then her parents. Remus and Al were last to enter, the latter exchanging some pleasantries with their guide goblin first.

They found themselves in an ornately furnished and tastefully decorated office that looked more like a conference hall than an office. The main furniture in the office was not a desk, as Harry had suspected, but rather, a large oblong shaped table with eighteen seats, including one at the head of the table.

Before the door was even closed, another goblin was already making his way towards them, and as soon as he had reached the proper distance, the goblin bowed, "Mr. Potter" the goblin said as he

recovered from his bow and inclined his head in respect as a reply to the bow that Harry had given him, "Welcome to my office, I am Senior Manager Grimfist" he gave them all a grin, which, as he is a goblin, would probably intimidate people more than anything else, before he motioned for Harry to take the seat at the head of the table.

Harry did so, though he insisted that Hermione sit at his right hand side. This did not anger Grimfist, more, the goblin looked as if he had expected that that would be the case. Since Hermione was already seated at the right hand of Harry, her parents took the seats beside hers, and both Remus and Al sat beside them, leaving the entire left hand side of Harry devoid of life.

This, however, seemed to be what was really supposed to happen, because Grimfist took a seat on Harry's left hand side after asking for the permission to do so, and once he was seated, three other goblins entered the office from a different door behind Grimfist.

These three goblins all bowed, first, towards Harry, who stood as he received the bow, surprising all goblins inside the office, and then towards Grimfist before they asked, and were given permission, to take their seats beside Grimfist.

As soon as everyone was seated, Grimfist turned towards Harry and asked, "Where would you like to begin, Mr. Potter?"

Harry nodded, he glanced at Hermione, an indication that he had no idea what he is supposed to say, before turning back towards Grimfist, "In all honesty, Senior Manager" he began, "I have no idea"

Grimfist blinked, he looked surprised, and then he nodded, but before he can say anything, Al cut in, "With respect, Senior Manager, perhaps, it would be better if we begin with the Will of Lord James and Lady Lily"

Grimfist sadly shook his head, "Alas, Lord Alvin" he began, "That would indeed be the correct procedure, but the Wizengamot had sealed the Last Will and Testament of Lord and Lady Potter, and no amount of persuasion from our part would convince them to unseal it" he looked dejected as he added, "More, the Chief Warlock had used this move in an attempt to get all the Potter vaults under his

control, but I tell you that he would play the flute first before that happens"

"Back up, back up" Harry said, interrupting the conversation, he looked at Grimfist and clarified, "Dumbledore sealed my parents will and then used it to control the money?" when Grimfist nodded, Harry added, "I know that he has been stealing from me, but I did not know that" he said the last towards his two guardians who have accompanied him, Remus and Al.

Remus apologized, "I am sorry, Harry" he began, he looked angry, though he was controlling it, better than Al, in fact, as he added, "We did not know that the Chief Manipulator sealed your parents will," he looked disturbed as he added, "We know that Lily and James would never allow you to be raised with the Dursley's, but we did not know that he sealed the will"

"We owe those bastards one visit Remus" Al suddenly said, everyone in the table, save for Remus and, surprisingly, Dan, cringed at the tone that the battle wizard had used. Even Grimfist and his assistants did, and they are goblins, "I intend to repay them for the 'kindness' that they have shown the Potter heir for fifteen years"

"As long as you include me in that get together, I would have no comments against it" Hermione suddenly said, and everyone looked at her as she did, and then cringed once more. She was glowing white, and everyone in the table, even her parents, can sense her anger as she said that. If the goblins were inclined to offer insurances to muggles, then they would be avoiding the Dursley's now.

"Okay people" Emma said, placating everyone in the table, "Why don't we all calm down for a few moments and get back to the topic at hand?" she suggested pleasantly, but everyone in the table can hear the tone in her voice that she would not take kindly to anyone who would ignore her suggestion.

Hermione nodded, as did Al, though in the case of the latter, a full five seconds had passed first as he calmed himself.

"Now then" Grimfist said, "Sealing the will had some unexpected pleasant consequences, at least, for our point of view" he grinned as

he looked at Harry and explained, "We do not know what your parents had written in their will, and I am afraid that I never had the pleasure of meeting your father and mother, but from the words of my predecessor, we goblins believe them to be kind and caring, more, they treated is with respect and are preferred clients of our bank, so we believe that they had left behind some monetary considerations for their friends"

"So basically, since you do not know what is written, the will can be disregarded" Hermione concluded, she looked at Harry and explained, "it means that all the contents of those vaults would go to Harry regardless of what his parents had said"

Grimfist nodded, "That is correct" he replied, "Of course, it would be advisable to retrieve the will so that we may see it, and so that we can honor it, but not necessary for Mr. Potter to become Lord Potter"

Al nodded, he looked at Harry and said, "Since you are the last of the Potters, it all belongs to you" he explained, and then he elaborated, "For the sake of explanation, let us say that your father and mother designated someone else to be Lord Potter, because of the fact that the will is sealed and cannot be read, their wish is disregarded, forcing the law to designate the next Lord Potter, and that would be you"

Grimfist nodded, "And the best part is, even if the will, no matter how improbable it is, named someone other than you, Mr. Potter" he looked at Harry, "it would not matter, the law of succession is ironclad"

"May I say something?" Dan asked, and when permission was given, Dan said, "I think that we are thinking too much about being sneaky here, because I think that Harry's parents would have left everything to him"

"I agree with those sentiments" Remus added, he looked at Harry and said, "There is no one else whom James would have left everything he had to, and while I also agree with the assessment of Master Grimfist, that there are several bequests in those will, I am sure that they are of small consequence"

Harry nodded, "Very well" he said, he looked at Grimfist and asked, "Master Grimfist, exactly what are my inheritances?"

Grimfist grinned again, he motioned to the three other goblins and said, "I have invited Account Managers Scartooth, Griphook, and Grayback to this meeting because they are the ones who are more familiar with these accounts Mr. Potter" at the look on the face of Hermione, Grimfist thought to explain, "My function as Senior Manager of the Potter accounts is to supervise the three main vaults and the seven minor vaults that have the name Potter written on them"

Hermione blinked, "Three?" she asked, and when Grimfist nodded, she complained, "but goblin banking law states that families may only have one main vault"

"Yes, families with the same name may only have one vault" Grimfist clarified, he did not look angry that Hermione knows the goblin banking law, more, he looked pleasantly surprised that she does, "But the three vaults we are talking about here only has the name Potter written on them, they are not Potter vaults per se, but rather, the Potter family is the only living heir to them all"

Harry and Hermione looked at Al and Remus, both figuring out that the two men should know about this since they are the ones who are managing the Potter estate in the absence of Harry, but one look at both men confirmed that they have no idea what the hell was being talked about.

"I am sorry Harry" Al said, "but as I told you, I am not privy to the financial capital of the Potter family," he smiled and said, "the only Potter capital I am aware of is their military capability"

"You are telling me that Harry here has his own army?" Dan asked, surprised.

Al shook his head, "Not much of an army if we would use that term" he admitted, "Just a few men and women who are stationed all around the world, mostly protecting Potter land in other countries, and a few more, around seven hundred people, give or take" he sighed and added, "I am, nominally, commander of that force, but even I do not know where my people are, I know their names and numbers, and I know how to contact them, not their location"

Grimfist smiled at that, "Contact to these different men and women are handled by Gringotts, Mr. Granger, so Lord Alvin has to contact us first" he said.

Harry nodded, "May I know the names of these vaults that I have?" Harry asked, he looked in fascination as the three goblins withdrew a box each in response to the question and pushed all three boxes towards him.

"the family rings in these boxes would recognize you as the heir" Grimfist said, he opened the first box and said, "This is the Potter family ring, and I think that this is the one that you should try first"

Harry nodded, he studied the ring and found it beautiful yet simple. There was only one stone in it, a white sparkling diamond, but at the center of the diamond was a shield that Harry instantly recognized as the same shield as the one that hangs on the living room of Potter manor, the shield of the coat-of-arms of the Potter family. Tiny engravings surround the diamond on the outside and upon closer examination, Harry saw that they are the same words that are written on the family crest.

Harry tried on the ring, and it fitted easily. Grimfist looked, for some reason, disappointed when nothing else happened. He was about to open his mouth to say something when the ring suddenly glowed, emitting a light that surrounded Harry for a few moments, and then, something else happened, the light suddenly surrounded Hermione as well, but in her case, she was also suddenly wearing a ring which was an exact copy of the ring that Harry now wore, except that the diamond was smaller.

A surprised Grimfist looked at Harry, and then at Hermione, and then back at Harry before realizing that the young Lord Potter has no idea what the hell is happening, so he looked at his two guardians, Remus and Al, with a questioning look.

Both Remus and Al were surprised as well, but they looked as if they were half-expecting what had happened. Al was the first one to get over the shock of what had happened and looked at Grimfist, "We were half-expecting this, yes" he admitted, "but not this early, certainly not like this"

"Can someone please explain what is going on" Emma demanded, she would have demanded that from her daughter, since she was certain that she would get more answers from her, but the problem was, Hermione was staring at Harry, while Harry was staring at her, and it was pretty clear that both of them are not going to be answering any questions anytime soon.

"Dan, Emma" Al said, looking at the two parents, he sighed and then said, "You just witnessed something that I never thought I would witness," he glanced at Harry and Hermione, both of whom were still staring at each other as if there was no one else in the room but the two of them, though by now, they are also smiling at each other, "A soul-bond marriage"

"Back up, Al" Dan suddenly said, he glanced at his princess and Harry, and admitted, at least to himself, that he had never seen a couple so obviously made for each other, before turning his attention back towards his friend and saying, "You're telling me that my daughter is now married?"

Al nodded, he watched as Dan started to get angry, but he, Al, smiled and said, "I know what your reaction would be, Dan" he said, "but please, let me explain" Dan nodded, and Al continued, "You've already witnessed the light that came from them when they shared their first kiss, I would have bet that they were married that time, but this is the first proof that we have"

Grimfist thought to rejoin the conversation before Dan Granger started shouting at the top of his lungs, something that, even though there are silencing and privacy charms surrounding the office, he is sure he would not want to witness, and said, "The magic of the Potter family ring recognized Lord Potter" he indicated Harry, "but it took sometime because the ring also detected that Lord Potter now has two souls inhabiting his body, and the magic looked for the owner of that part of the soul, and found your daughter"

"Basically" Remus said, looking at Dan, "Harry has a part of his soul in Hermione, and your daughter has a part of hers in Harry," he looked at Dan and Emma, his gaze boring straight into their eyes, though there was nothing hostile in his gaze, "This is what it means to be soul-bound"

At that moment, both Harry and Hermione dropped their gaze from each other, though it was clear that they did not do so because of embarrassment, more, they are giving off indications that they would want nothing more but to continue what they were doing and stare at each other. Harry turned towards the two other boxes that were in front of him, and he opened one of them without even moving.

"Such control" Al suddenly commented, looking at Harry as he opened the box using wandless magic, he smiled and said, "Not even Lord James, or Lord Charles, could have done that, and that box he opened, that was the Peverell family, not someone who would just bow"

Harry looked at Al, but Al shook his head and motioned for Harry to try on the ring. Harry studied the ring and saw that, unlike the Potter ring, this one was much more extravagant with no less than five small diamonds and eight rubies. Harry had a hard time wearing this one ring, it seemed as if there was an invisible barrier that is preventing him from wearing the ring, but after a few moments, he was able to wear the ring and in an instant, a light surrounded him.

Since the Peverell family was not his main family, everyone assumed that the light would only engulf Harry, so everyone inside the room who understood pureblood politics, even the goblins, were rendered mute when the same light engulfed Hermione and a smaller version of the Peverell family ring appeared on her hand as well.

"Okay" Dan said after the light subsided, this time, Harry and Hermione did not stop time to look at each other, "I think that we can do without being reminded that my princess is now married every time" he looked at Al and Remus, saw the shocked expressions on their face, and then at the goblins, where he also registered the same shock, before he looked back at Al and Remus, "I take it that that is not supposed to happen then"

As usual, it was Al who recovered first, "yes" he admitted, he looked at Hermione and saw that she was now wearing two rings and shook his head in disbelief before looking back at Dan and Emma and explaining, "The Potter family ring recognizing Hermione as the next Lady Potter was half-expected, but the Peverell Ring?" he asked, and then he shook his head again, "Never before has a woman been made lady of two Ancient and Noble Houses at the

same time, traditionally, lords of two ancient and noble families may have two wives"

"I guess that this means that Harry would rather only have Hermione by his side" Emma commented dryly.

To her surprise, Remus, and then Al, nodded, "Taking into consideration that light we saw when they first kissed? I guess that we should not be surprised when the third ring recognizes Hermione as well" Remus said.

Harry nodded, he smiled at the girl who apparently is now his wife, and then opened the third box, this time manually. The ring resting inside the box called to him, not as compelling as the Potter family ring, but certainly more than the Peverell ring. Harry gently picked the ring and studied it, the ring itself appeared to be made of gold and there was only one stone in it, a ruby.

Harry easily wore the ring and was surrounded by a nimbus of golden-white light. Expecting Hermione to be surrounded by the same light, everyone turned their attention towards her, but was disappointed when she appeared fine. As the white light surrounding Harry dissipated, everyone assumed that for this one family, Hermione would not be the lady as well.

Suddenly, Hermione was surrounded by a golden nimbus of light as well, though it was subtly different from the one that had surrounded Harry. Within a few moments, Hermione was wearing a third ring, but it was different from the one that Harry was wearing.

"The Ancient and Noble House of Gryffindor" Grimfist said, nodding towards Harry. The eyes of the goblin widened when he saw the ring that Hermione was wearing, and in awe-struck tones, he said, "the Ancient and Noble House of Ravenclaw" before chuckling as he said, "The Heir of Gryffindor and the Heir of Ravenclaw bonded together," he smiled, "Rowena Ravenclaw and Godric Gryffindor would have been pleased to know that their descendants are bonded"

"As they are bonded, Master Grimfist" Al added.

"Lord and Lady Potter" Grimfist said, he stood up, as did his fellow goblins, and said, "May we at Gringotts be the first to congratulate

you on your bonding, marriage, and assumption of four Ancient and Noble Families, including two of Hogwarts" he smiled and explained, "As you are bonded, my Lord, my Lady, everything that is his is hers and everything that is hers is his" saying that, Grimfist and his fellow goblins placed their enclosed right fists over their left chest and bowed towards the two of them.

Dan and Emma voiced their congratulations as well, though it was more for the marriage. The two Granger parents realized that their daughter is so much in love with Harry that they have no choice but to approve of their marriage, though both are still planning on going through a ceremony.

Remus and Al were the last to give their congratulations.

"Now, Lord Potter" Grimfist said, "I take it that you would want to start with House Potter first?"

Harry nodded. The goblin that Harry recognized as Griphook stood up, bowed towards Harry and said, "Lord Potter, I am Griphook, account manager for the Potter family vaults" he withdrew from his person a portfolio and opened it, "As of our most recent audit, your family vault has twenty seven million six hundred eighteen thousand five hundred fifty three galleons, forty two sickles and three knuts in liquid capital, your family investments number slightly more than that, with a total of twenty eight million galleons in stocks, bonds and other investments."

Dan nearly fainted when Griphook mentioned the amount, and then he reminded himself that this is only one of Harry's accounts.

"The Potter family has property in all six continents, and Lord James, perhaps in jest, had asked us to prepare a property for him in the Arctic Circle." Griphook said, "You have manors in almost all Western European Countries and some in East Asia as well. There are five manors scattered across the United States and three in Canada"

"The Potter portfolio is easily your most profitable and biggest vault, Lord Potter" Gimfist said.

"Quite" Griphook agreed, he flipped the page and handed it to Harry, who saw a list. He read the title as 'Investments' followed by names

and amounts. Most of the companies that Harry saw there were unknown to him, but he can see that most of them were made in the muggle world. He was also pleasantly surprised when he saw that he actually has sizable stocks in the muggle transportation community, including several in the car manufacturer Jaguar and the aircraft company Gulfstream.

"As to the deficiencies in the vault" Griphook continued, "We know that Albus Dumbledore and Molly Weasley were the ones who had taken the most, but there are others as well, including the two Weasley children, Ronald and Ginevra. In any case, we have counted the deficiency at ten million galleons, most of which went to the vault of Albus Dumbledore"

"What actions can Harry take?" Dan asked.

"I would not advise going through the ministry" Griphook replied instantly, "Albus Dumbledore, as Chief Warlock, can easily make his actions legal, so Gringotts would suggest that Lord Potter lock his vault, and at the same time, demand compensation through Gringotts"

"We will do so" Hermione said. Few had noticed that she and Harry have been looking at one another as this bit of news was delivered, and everyone missed Harry nodding when Griphook made the suggestion.

Griphook nodded and made a note in the portfolio. He was followed by Scartooth, who was the account manager for the Peverell Account, and Grayback, who is the account manager for the Gryffindor Account. Halfway to the discussion, they were joined by Longtooth, whom Grimfist introduced as the account manager for the Ravenclaw account.

After the meeting, Harry and Hermione found themselves as controlling a financial empire that was worth close to two hundred million galleons, several properties in all continents and the controlling stake of Hogwarts, making Harry and Hermione more powerful than the headmaster when it comes to the control of the school.

"Lastly, Lord and Lady Potter" Grimfist said, he produced ten keys and laid them at the table, "We know that you are currently staying

at the Potter Manor in England, but we do not think that this is the best place for you," he indicated the keys, "these are keys to the different Potter manors located all around Western Europe and the one in New York."

Harry looked at Al and nodded. Since Al was the only one who had visited every single one of the Potter Manors, Harry left him in charge of picking one. The battle wizard picked one key and said, "This is the key to the Manor in the Rhine, I think that it would be best for us to move here" he smiled and said, "the Germany Ministry is not too keen when it comes to underage magic, and we need to train you properly Harry" his grin grew wider as he added, "And your lawyer, Anton Rosseu is supposed to be German"

Harry looked at Hermione and then at her parents. All three Granger's nodded, so Harry gave his permission, "Germany it is"

Hermione thanked Harry by throwing herself at him and kissing him.

FIVE

Potter Manor

Rhineland, Germany

Harry awoke on his first day on his new home. As his eyes opened, his first inclination was to pinch himself awake, but since he already knows that he is not dreaming, he decided that that would be a waste of time.

Instead, he decided to take in the completely, in his opinion, unnecessary luxury that is surrounding him.

He remembered when they first arrived at this manor last night, he was not the only one who was taken aback by the display of luxury right in front of them.

They had decided to celebrate the marriage, though the Granger parents are still insisting on a proper wedding, first before heading off to Germany. Harry, as the groom, treated everyone to the most expensive restaurant in the Alley, allowing him to use his new Gringotts card. At first, Harry thought that the Order would make an appearance then and there, so he was surprised when not a single member of the Order who was not invited, meaning, only Sirius and Remus, crashed the celebration. They ended up staying until seven in the evening, spending more than seven hours talking, teasing and playing with each other.

After dinner, it was straight to Germany, and because of their preferred client status, and because of the fact that the Potters have never been on the wrong side of the law, they did not worry about immigration, in fact, their immigration papers came to them while they were eating a full five hours before they stepped foot in any German territory.

Whatever form of travel that they had used to travel from London to this place, Harry had never experienced it before. He was sure that it was not apparition, since Dan and Emma are muggles, and he is sure that it is also not floo, he would need a fireplace for that and if that was the case, they would have ended up in a fireplace as well, and it sure was not portkey, since the familiar tugging was not present this time around.

Unfortunately, Sirius and Remus are unable to join them since Dumbledore scheduled an emergency meeting at Grimmauld the following day. Sirius and Remus both reckoned that the topic would be his, Harry's, disappearance, and both Marauders are already planning on using her disappearance as an excuse to deny Dumbledore the use of the Black family home.

Harry shook himself awake and then rolled off of his bed. With one glance at the bed, he gave off another sigh, the bed was a four poster bed that was as wide as the company car of Vernon Dursley was as long. The bed, being a four poster has a canopy and curtains, and due to the size of the bed, there were electrical light hanging at the canopy of the bed.

Harry's room in the manor, which the head-elf called Timmy had called as the room of the Lord Potter, was the largest in the house. Harry had learned that evening that it has its own bathroom, a bathroom that was the size of the entire ground floor of Number Four.

This is where Harry headed next, and he shook his head once more as he studied his personal bathroom, there was a shower cubicle that was bigger than the bathroom at Number Four, a, relatively, small bathtub, small because, compared to the other bathtub in the room, which was a swimming pool, it can only hold six people at the same time, as well as four sinks and four toilets, the latter, Harry was pleased to see, as ordinary as it gets. He had to admit that he was half-expecting the toilets to be made of gold.

A few minutes later, a fully refreshed and newly showered Harry Potter emerged from his room and into the hallway of the second floor of his house. He was pleasantly surprised to see Hermione was waiting for him as he opened the door, silently debating with herself whether or not to enter his room without asking permission.

From what Harry can read from her face, she was frustrated that, despite the fact that they are already married, her parents had forbidden her from staying in the same bed as Harry. Dan and Emma had pleaded with Hermione, to no avail, that they should sleep at different beds, at least, until the end of the week. When that failed, Dan and Emma turned to Harry, who agreed with the

deadline. He can tell that she was disappointed, but he felt that he had ably defended his stance at agreeing with her parents.

"Waiting long?" Harry asked as he kissed his wife good morning.

Hermione pouted, "I was expecting to wake up with my husband beside me" she replied, and then she smirked, "And I was also expecting my good morning kiss in bed"

"Look at the bright side, love," Harry said, "The end of the week is just two days from now"

"Oh yeah" Hermione replied, smiling broadly at that, "And best part is, my parents made the deal so they cannot do anything about it" she jumped once, giving off the impression that she would have wanted to scream 'yes' at the top of her lungs, but managed to control herself just enough to ask, "Care to escort me to breakfast?"

Harry smiled, "But of course, my lovely lady" Harry replied, he offered her his hand, which she took, and they walked towards the nearest staircase, there are five in this house that goes from the ground floor to the second floor, which was around the corner.

A few minutes later, the house was that big, the two of them entered the dinning room still holding each other. They were unsurprised to see Dan and Emma in the room, sitting on the table and having their breakfast, when they entered, but apparently, Al was a late riser, or at least, he seemed to be, since he is not yet at the dinning room.

Harry took his position at the head of the table, everyone in the room, including a few house-elves who decided to pop in, demanded that he sit there, while Hermione took her usual seat at his right hand side. No sooner had they taken their seat when breakfast, which consists of fried egg, bacons and sausages popped into the flat surface before them.

"Don't we get a choice in breakfast?" Harry asked in jest, but he nevertheless turned his attention towards his breakfast.

"We do" Dan replied, he had just finished his breakfast when he did so, "but since you did not say anything, I guess that our cook decided to give you the regular one" he smiled as he glanced at an

empty seat beside him, "You should've seen Al's breakfast, it was classic"

"Too many?" Harry asked, mentally trying to block an image of an eating Ronald Weasley.

"Nah" Dan replied, "It was just weird, but not that much to him apparently, he likes it"

At that moment, Al entered the room. He was sweating and had a white towel over his left shoulder. He seemed to have caught on what Dan was saying a few moments ago, and said, "Just because you do not eat it does not mean you should criticize it Dan" he smiled, "I happen to like smoke-dried milkfish and rice"

"Okay" Harry said, looking at his father-in-law and at Al at the same time, he nodded once and then said, "I would definitely have to try that"

"Good" Al replied, ignoring the horrified look on the face of Dan, he looked at Harry and added, "Tomorrow then, and after that, we can get some training done"

"Al, not to be rude but..." Harry said, he looked at the battle wizard up and down, and then asked, "What have you been doing?"

"Exercise" Al replied, he looked at Harry, noted that he was freshly showered, and then at Hermione, who was also freshly showered, before turning his attention back towards Harry, "Don't worry, tomorrow, after breakfast you're joining me" a notebook appeared on the flat surface in front of him and he opened it, "Right, so tomorrow, you need to be awake at five in the morning, we'll have a light jog around the estate," he smiled as he looked at Harry and Hermione, "Don't worry, its only about five kilometers, should be no problem, before we have breakfast, then after that, I'll need to review your defense skills"

He looked at Harry intently and said, "Remus had told me about your performance in his class two years ago Harry, so I think that you would do well with this" then he turned his attention towards Hermione, "Same with you Hermione, so I don't think that there would be a problem"

Both Harry and Hermione nodded, "What about charms and transfiguration?" Hermione asked.

"You'll have to ask Remus and Sirius for that one" Al replied, he smiled and said, "I know I look as if I have mastered all of those subjects folks, but the truth is, Sirius is better than me at transfiguration, he is an auror after all and that was basic, while Remus is better at charms than defense" he sighed before adding, "Moony would have been a charms master by now, if not for his furry little problem, and I think Sirius would be at the same level with transfiguration, but, of course he cannot take the test since he released himself from Azkaban"

"No worries though" Al said, he smiled and said, "This just means that you have me training you solo until the end of the week, coincidentally" he smirked as he looked at Dan, "Wasn't that the deadline before the two of you can sleep together"

Al loved watching the face of his friend turn red, which, he had to admit, was why he was teasing him with his own daughter.

Hermione nodded, "We won't do anything until after the marriage" she said, she looked at Harry and said, "Since we are both raised in the muggle world, we both think that we need a proper marriage first before we go to that"

Al nodded his approval, "that's good" he replied, he smiled and said, "Doesn't mean that I cannot use it to make Dan's face red every now and then though" he sighed, and before Dan can say anything, Al added, "Back to training, the three of us would be best friends, at least, during the summer break, I would not only be teaching you magical defense, I would also be teaching you fencing, martial art, and target shooting" he looked at Harry and asked in a serious tone, "I heard that you drew the sword of Gryffindor during the Chamber of Secrets debacle" Harry nodded, which made Al excited, "May I see the sword?"

Harry paused, he blinked and then said, "I would love to show it to you" and then he looked crestfallen as he added, "unfortunately, its at Hogwarts"

Al looked at Harry, and then laughed, "Lemon-Drop never told you that by drawing that weapon, that weapon is now yours?" when

Harry shook his head, Al stopped laughing and now looked a bit angry, "Figures" he said, "Lemon-Drop would not have wanted you to have the sword" he sighed once more and said, "Listen Harry, by drawing that sword, you have proven to be worthy of it, even if you are not the heir of Gryffindor"

"Does that mean that I can call the sword?" Harry asked.

Al smiled, he raised his right hand and all of a sudden, a blade, Harry recognized it as the one that he was wearing yesterday, appeared on his hand. From the way that it gleamed and the perfect beauty of the weapon, both Harry and Hermione realized that Al was holding a goblin forged weapon, "My personal sword" Al said, laying the weapon on the flat surface in front of him, "Forged by the Goblin master blacksmith Dragonbreath when I was sixteen"

Harry nodded, he was still looking at the weapon, it had a curved blade, unlike the sword of Gryffindor, and there are runes carved into the blade itself. Harry cannot read runes, but Hermione can, and she easily read the runes that was etched on the blade of the weapon, and translated it, she turned towards Al and asked, "Tenacious Justice?"

"Tenacious of Justice" Al replied, correcting what she had said, he smiled and added, "The York family motto" he turned towards Harry and instructed, "Hold out your right hand and will for the weapon to appear"

Harry did so, though he had to wait for a couple of minutes, long minutes during which he felt stupid, having his right arm upraised, before a sword materialized. Harry and Hermione instantly recognized it as the sword of Gryffindor. Harry laid the weapon on his left hand side and allowed Al to study it.

"I see that the descriptions did not do it justice" Al commented, he hefted the weapon and nodded in appreciation, "Indeed" he said, though it was more to himself, "A fine battle weapon" he smiled and looked at Harry, "Since you've already used this sword, I do not think that I would have a hard time to teach you"

"Sorry" Harry said, shaking his head, "I just used it to stab the basilisk, I really did not use it to block or parry another sword"

Al smiled, "Why is it that everyone assume that that is how swords are used?" he asked rhetorically, he shook his head and then looked at Dan, "I trust that you are current?"

Dan nodded, "Browning and L1A1" he replied.

Al nodded, he smiled and said, "Good thing you left active service a long time ago then" he looked at Hermione, and then back at Dan, "Does she?"

Dan shook her head, he smiled and offered, "I would have taught her to scare the potential suitors away, but somehow, never got to do that," he pretended to pout as he added, "now she's married, what's the use?"

Al laughed, "Well, she would be part of the training, so I guess that I would have to start from scratch" he said, he looked thoughtful for a few moments, and then said, "9 mm., wouldn't want them to try the bigger ones yet, and just pistols" he looked back at Dan, "martial arts?"

Dan shook his head, "Didn't see the need for it" he replied. Al saw Emma frown at that statement, Dan seemed to have noticed it as well, so he cringed and admitted, "Okay, we tried, but the first person who tried to hit her during practice found her hair color changed" he smiled and said, "We now know what that is, but back then, we sure as hell did not"

Al nodded, he turned towards Hermione, saw her blushing, and decided to add a but to her embarrassment, "Don't worry, Hermione, you won't be able to change my hair color," before turning to Harry and saying, "I guess that I do not need to ask you about this one"

Harry nodded, "My only experience with martial arts is when Dudley needs a punching bag" he said, he noted the hostility coming from the eyes of Al, and was pleased to see that the hostility was not directed towards him, and Harry knew whom that hostility was targeted to.

"We would be making a visit to that place soon enough" Al said, he shook his head and said, "So this simply means that I also have to teach you two basic martial arts," he grinned and said, "Should be fun"

12 Grimmauld Place

London, England

There was tension in the air, that much was obvious. Albus Dumbledore was attempting to calm the members of the Order and he was already using his magic to do so, but somehow, it seemed that the anger of the members of the Order is powerful enough to negate his subtle cheering charm.

"People, please" Sirius suddenly said, he stole the attention of everyone by firing a couple of noise-maker spells. All attention was turned towards him, "While we are arguing about this, Harry may be in danger, we need to do something about that first, before we think of ways to tear out each others throats"

"Sirius is right" a towering black man with two golden earrings said in a deep voice that seemed to calm everyone, "We need to find Harry first"

Albus nodded, he had to hide his smile as he noted that the ones who had calmed the members were Sirius and Kingsley Shacklebolt, an auror who, ironically, is the one in charge of the hunt for Sirius. Dumbledore had long branded the two men as born leaders, and in the case of Shack, this was more obvious.

"What about his trial, Headmaster?" a member of the Order, Hestia Jones, asked, she looked at the Headmaster and said, "We've heard that Harry had chosen someone else to represent him for this trial"

"I do not think that anyone else can represent the boy better than the Headmaster" a squeaky voice that everyone noted belonged to Daedalus Diggle, said, he looked insulted that Harry had even thought of thinking that someone else can represent him better than Albus Dumbledore.

"Don't be so sure Diggle" Mad-Eye Moody, standing at the rear of the meeting room, said, attention was diverted towards him and he explained, "Potter has chosen Anton Rosseu as his counsel for his hearing" at the blank look on the face of mostly everyone in the room, Moody added, "He is the man who prosecuted Richelieu in France, the wannabe Dark Lord that was so powerful, it was said

that anyone who would tackle him tends to end up at the bottom of the Seine," he said, "Rosseau was also the one who tackled Wolfe, one of Grindelwald's protégé, so bad that kids are said to cry at the mere mention of his name, but so good that there was no way that he can be prosecuted, Potter's counsel proved them wrong"

"A super-lawyer" Snape commented under his breath, he looked at Dumbledore and asked, "Are you okay with this?"

"Unfortunately, whether or not I agree with the choice of young Mr. Potter is moot until we can find him" Dumbledore admitted, he sighed and said, "He is the only one who can change his legal representatives"

"What about his relatives?" Remus asked.

"Unfortunately" another auror, Tonks, people use her first name at their peril, said, shaking her head, she added, "Petunia Dursley was rather off with us, she saw us coming to her door, and before we can even knock, she was threatening us already with a shotgun in her hand" she looked at Dumbledore and added, "there is no way I am going to attack a house with an oversized ostrich holding a gun guarding it"

"You made the right choice in that one Tonks" Shack said, he looked at Dumbledore and said, "We would be endangering ourselves if we continued with that route, and we are already sure that his relations do not know where he is" his lips nearly disappeared as he said, "Specially after how they treated their nephew, it is a wonder that they are still whole"

"This is not helping" Sirius said, he looked positively irritated as he said that, and angry as well. many people in the room can see that most of his anger is directed at Dumbledore, whether or not it was because Sirius blames Dumbledore for Harry's disappearance or because Dumbledore has given instructions that Sirius cannot leave headquarters, they do not know, "I will not take this sitting down Dumbledore"

"I know Sirius" Dumbledore replied, "He is important to our world"

"I couldn't care less about the world" Sirius retorted, he stamped his foot down on the floor, "The world can burn for all I care, but I care about my godson, I want him found"

Even Snape was smart enough not to cross Sirius when he is this angry, he tried once and it nearly cost him his life, so he kept silent despite the fact that the potions professor would want nothing more but to retort to the statement of Sirius Black.

"What about at his friends place Headmaster?" Hestia Jones asked, "I mean, the boy is only fifteen, there is no way that he can live alone on the streets, and retaining a counsel like Rosseu practically screams that he is receiving help"

Dumbledore looked sheepish as Hestia Jones said that, and unfortunately for Dumbledore, Sirius noticed, though to be fair, Sirius was waiting for it, "Dumbledore, has some other screw up happened?" he asked, from the tone of his voice, it was clear that Sirius was not just asking, he was also demanding.

The other Order members joined Sirius in demanding answers, which left Dumbledore with no choice, "Our Order Guards watching the Granger residence reports that the Granger residence is abandoned"

Sirius shot up, "What the hell were the guards doing?" he demanded, he looked at Dumbledore and demanded, "I want to hear directly from them" and unfortunately for the unfortunate guards, almost everyone in the Order supported Sirius's demands.

Daedalus Diggle swallowed first before he raised his hand, "I was in charge of the guard there that night" he admitted, "I was with Sturgis Podmore, who is on duty today at the Ministry and Erick Argwood, who is on duty at Number Ten today"

"Leaves you as the only one to explain this fiasco then" Sirius said, he stared at Diggle, who cringed at the gaze of Sirius, but managed a nod, "Then explain please" Sirius made it clear that it was not a request this time, it was an outright demand.

"A friend of theirs dropped by for a visit" Diggle said, he thought about informing the members of the Order that the same man managed to injure Diggle even though he was invisible, but thought

better of it, "After a conversation of about five hours, which we thought normal, the Granger's piled into their vehicle and left the house, followed by this friend of theirs in his own vehicle"

"You didn't deign to follow them?" Remus asked.

"We thought that they would return" Diggle replied, defending himself.

"You think that Harry is with the Granger's?" Tonks asked Dumbledore, who shook his head, "But they seem to be close, from the reports that we have read, I thought that it was pretty obvious that the two of them would end up together"

"I dare you to say that in front of Harry, Tonks" Remus said, and then he turned serious, "The Headmaster is correct, the Granger's may have went to their vacation, they are an outgoing family who has the financial capability to do so"

"But without bags?" Diggle asked, he fell silent when he caught Sirius glaring at him.

"Then how else do you explain this?" Remus asked, he sighed and then said, "No matter how important Hermione is, however, she is nothing compared to Harry, it is Harry whom we need to find, not Hermione, who is with her parents anyway"

"Remus is right" Dumbledore said, "Ms. Granger is not our priority, it is Mr. Potter" he sighed once before adding, "I've tried to send letters to Harry, but the owls refuse to take delivery"

This bit of news shocked everyone, since there are only two reasons for owls to refuse delivery, either the person to whom the letter is supposed to be delivered is already dead, or he is so far away that the owls cannot reach it. Since everyone assumed that Harry cannot leave the country, everyone assumed that it is the former.

"You mean Potter is dead?" Tonks asked.

"He may be in a place that is so far away that the owl cannot reach it" Sirius said, "or it may be that he is in a house that the owl cannot reach so it is considered far" he looked at Dumbledore and said, "You have two days" he then revised it to include the whole Order,

"The Order has two days to find my godson or I..." he paused and looked at Remus, who made a show of sadly nodding, "or Remus and myself would withdraw ourselves and ours from the Order, including use of this headquarters"

SIX

Potter Manor

Rhineland, Germany

Harry and Hermione were both panting like there is no tomorrow, while in front of them; Al looked amused at how they looked. They had woken up early to begin their training, and as Al had promised, they started off with a supposedly light jog before breakfast.

It was a 'light' jog, if you had been keeping yourself fit for the last ten years, but since Harry and Hermione rarely have time to do that, by the time that they reached the first kilometer, they are already panting heavily. Al did try to help them, summoning some energy restoring potions which he had them drink before he resumed the march. Since Harry and Hermione had a tendency to drop every kilometer, Al had to summon more and more restoring potions, though he did not think that it was enough of a problem to stop the march.

Harry and Hermione were so beat-up that they cannot even appreciate the sights around them as they jogged down a trail flanked on both sides by a beautiful forest, and to cap it off, Al added insult to the injury by jogging backwards every few minutes, ostensibly to check on them, but in reality, to irritate them.

Now standing in front of the Manor House, Al had told them not to sit until their leg muscles have cooled down, they are tired, hungry, and cold, but Al does not seem to have any plans of letting them relieve any of those feelings. Instead, he entered the manor house, leaving behind instructions that they are not to sit until he returns, before casually flicking his unusual wand over to them, smirking that he was making sure that they would not sit while he is away.

At first, Harry wondered about what Al did, and he found out when he tried to sit. As he was lowering himself on the ground, he felt something pushing him back up.

Harry was about to complain to Hermione when Al returned outside, he was preceded by three levitated boxes on top of each other, and followed by three levitated plates filled with breakfast.

Al motioned for Harry and Hermione to join him at one of the tables located on the lawn, and they did so, both Harry and Hermione grateful that they are allowed to sit. Al lowered the breakfasts first, one plate in front of Harry, Hermione and one for him, before he lowered the three boxes on the far end of the table.

Harry and Hermione stared at the plate in front of them, and then at Al, who was already eating his food. When Al saw Harry and Hermione looking at him, he looked back at both of them, and said, "You promised that you would try them, and I did tell you that we are going to try them today" he smiled and added, "Don't worry, they won't bite you"

Despite looking unconvinced, both Harry and Hermione nodded and turned their attention on the food in front of them.

After they were done eating, a selection of drinks appeared in front of the two of them. Al, apparently, only drinks coffee in the morning.

"Right then" Al said as he placed his cup on the flat surface in front of him, he looked at Harry and Hermione intently and said, "As I told you yesterday, I would first start off with you basic defense skills, we'll do that first" Harry was about to inform Al that they have left their wands at their rooms, since there was no place to tuck their wands in at the pajamas that they were forced to wear for the jog, but Al cut him off with a wave of his hand, "Don't worry" the battle wizard said, "I know you've left your things, and I would hardly think that" he looked at the two of them and smiled, "that wearing pajamas while shooting off spells is the best thing to do" he sighed and said, "I'll give you some time to fix that, don't worry"

"After defensive spell checks" Al continued, "You two would be making your first acquaintance with a firearm" he motioned to the three boxes in front of them, "had to special order them from Austria, but they should work fine" he glanced at the two teenagers in front of him, reminded himself that they are married, and then at the wristwatch that he was wearing, "Right, Harry, Hermione" he said, "I'm giving you a total of forty five minutes to freshen up, shower, change clothes, whatever it is that you do every morning, and then meet me over at the back of the house, with your wands" he looked at Harry and Hermione, grinned and added, "And for every one minute late, we'll add one kilometer to your distance tomorrow"

Both Harry and Hermione shot out of the table, heading towards the manor house. Al noted that despite the fact that they are rushing, they did not forget to hold hands as they entered the house. Al was more than prepared to bet that the two would be kissing each other good morning, since he, Al, had prevented them from doing so by waking them up early and marching them around the estate, when he is no longer looking.

Seeing the lovely couple, Al cannot help but smile towards himself. he sighed once as he realized what he was doing and then he snapped his finger, summoning another plateful of his breakfast favorite which he devoured while his students are preparing themselves for their morning lessons.

Al had fully expected to be able to eat his breakfast in peace this time, he did not, after all, miss the looks that both Harry and Hermione were giving him as he enjoyed his breakfast, so he was surprised when Dan sat beside him.

"Al" Dan said, greeting him, he sighed once, telling Al at once that whatever it is that Dan wanted to discuss with him is not something that both of them would be comfortable with, "Would you answer me truthfully this time"

"Sure" Al replied, even though he was sure that they both would not like what they are about to talk about.

Dan nodded, "You told us that your family has been serving Harry's family since the beginning of time" Al nodded, confirming that statement, "yet, why did you appear in front of him only after fifteen years?" Al was about to reply to that question, but Dan cut him off, "And I am not going to accept your excuse that you had to fight a war, I was there when we fought, and my daughter has known me all her life, the same cannot be said about you, though"

Al looked angry at his buddy for a few moments, and then he smiled and nodded, "Yes, my first inclination was to tell you that I had to fight a war" he admitted, and then he sighed and said, "but that was over before the year was even out" he looked at Dan and said, "It's a personal reason, Dan, but this much, I would tell you, I did not choose to let Harry live fifteen years ignorant of me, or of the fact that his father was a Lord, and that he is going to be one as well" he sighed and added, "If I was able, I would have appeared in front of

him when he first entered Hogwarts, that was the first time when we can be sure as to where he is" he smiled sadly as he shook his head, "Let's just say that something happened that time that made me unable to come to his assistance until three days ago"

Al looked at Dan, remembering that sometimes, the mild-mannered dentist can be infuriating when it comes to demanding information, especially when they are sequestered in a carrier where there is little to do, so Al was fully expecting Dan to continue asking him.

Dan, however, noted that whatever it is that had kept Al from coming to Harry's assistance, has had a great affect on his friend. it also had to be very personal, as when he looked at Al, Dan noted that Al was staring at something far-off that only he can see. Deciding that there is no way that Al would tell him what it is that had kept him, Dan accepted Al's explanation with a tiny nod, before he lightened up and motioned to the boxes in front of him, "Glock?" he asked.

Al smiled as he nodded, "17" he replied, "Want to try it?"

Dan's first inclination was to shake his head, he was a dentist now, for crying out loud, and even when he was in the service, he never had fun shooting guns, even if he was aiming at paper, but for some reason, and even though he kept current with some firearms, that was only because it was required by his reserve commission. After a few moments of staring at the box, however, he smiled and nodded, prompting the two men to carry on with their conversation at the range located on the back of the manor.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Albus Dumbledore walked down the halls of his school a worried man. First, he was visited by a school house-elf who told him that his office had resembled a battlefield, but that the elves had made the necessary repairs and he can return to it.

That was two hours ago, which necessitated Dumbledore returning to the school even though start of terms was ages away. The house-elf who made the report had accurately described which of his instruments have been damaged the most, and he remembered shuddering when the elf reported that all of his silver instruments,

most of which were used to track down and monitor Harry Potter, had been destroyed. The elf had also hypothesized that it was these instruments that had destroyed his office when they exploded, though Dumbledore cannot find any reason why the instruments would explode.

Second problem that the headmaster was facing was his lack of professors. Moody was adamant that he would not return to teach DADA, even if Dumbledore did pointed out that Moody spent the last year hidden in a trunk. Dumbledore shuddered involuntarily as he remembered the rant that followed after he unnecessarily reminded Moody of that fact.

His more important problem was trying to locate Harry, and at the same time, trying to locate an alternate headquarters since Sirius made his threat. Already, Dumbledore can feel the fidelus charm that he had placed in the house slipping as the more powerful wards that the Black Family had placed in their home for centuries reasserted themselves.

His most important problem, however, was the sudden disappearance of their funds. Order members who have been sent out to purchase several items that are needed for their operations reports that the extension cards that Dumbledore had given them are not accepted anymore in any shop. Daedalus Diggle even reported that he had to run as he was chased by muggle policeman who taught that he was a conman.

Dumbledore shook his head as he gave the password to the stone gargoyle that guards his office. He entered the office to find it restored to its grandeur, but the portraits of the previous headmasters are missing, as are the silver instruments that are the most important thing to Dumbledore right now. After all, if he can find Harry, he solves two of his three problems.

With Harry found, Sirius would not withdraw his support from the Order, allowing them to retain their headquarters in London. It would not take even a fraction of Dumbledore's strength to modify Harry's memory to convince him to donate a few more million galleons to the Order, 'after all', Dumbledore reminded himself, 'the boy is a warrior of the light.'

Potter Manor

Rhineland, Germany

Harry and Hermione found Al by following the sounds of firearms being fired. They have never visited the back of the manor house before, and were pleasantly surprised when they found themselves staring at an outdoor shooting range.

They were also surprised when they saw Dan, wearing ear muffers that must have made him deaf of the outside world, at one of the stalls in the range, aiming his pistol at a target downrange while being observed by Al. Hermione watched in fascination as her father expertly drilled thirteen holes in the paper target in front of him without breaking a sweat or stopping for a single second.

Al noticed that his two students have joined them, and he glanced at his wristwatch. Smiling, he informed them that they are early by a full ten minutes, and that while he was tempted to punish them for being early by adding ten kilometers to their planned march tomorrow, a deal is a deal, so they would only be marching five kilometers tomorrow.

"Right" Al said, he had changed from his jogging pants and white shirt to black robes, "Wands out". After Harry and Hermione took their wands out and handed them to Al, the battle wizard murmured a spell under his breath, before handing Harry's wand back to him and saying, "11', Holly with phoenix feather core" and then to Hermione as he handed her wand back to her, "10 $\frac{3}{4}$ ', Vine with Dragon Heartstring core"

Al motioned for Harry and Hermione to follow him to a table at the far end of the range. It was not far enough for them to no longer hear the explosions every time Dan pulls the trigger of his gun, and he is having so much fun doing so, if the amount of bullets that he had wasted is any indication, but far enough for them to ignore the sounds and listen to Al.

"Right" Al said, he drew his wand and placed it on a flat surface in front of him. Both Harry and Hermione have seen his wand before, but they never had the opportunity to ask him why his wand appears longer and thicker, so they asked him, and Al replied, "The wand is used by a witch or wizard as an instrument to focus their power, simply put, it is a conductor that helps you focus your magic" he

explained, "Students like yourselves usually have short wands since you are still, supposedly, learning, to control your magic" he smiled and asked, "Why do you think they refer to it as your first wand if they expect you to keep your wand with you for your entire lifetime? Would it not be better to just call it your wand?"

Both Harry and Hermione shot Al a blank look, informing the battle wizard that both have no idea why it is referred to like that, so Al continued, "In the East, when a witch or wizard enters school to study, he is given a training wand that anyone can use, though they break down every few thousand spells or so and had to be disposed of." He paused before adding, "It is only after they graduate from their magical training do they acquire their first true wand, in fact, in the east, a witch or wizard receives his first true wand as a traditional graduation gift"

"Why is it different in the West?" Hermione asked.

"because we are lazy" Al replied, he smiled and said, "Remember those practice wands that I am referring to a while ago?" both Harry and Hermione nodded, "Good, those wands, being practice wands, have the same characteristics, meaning...." He looked at Hermione.

Hermione replied, "The power output of each student depends on their magical core and their real capabilities, instead of the wand capacity" she replied easily, and then her eyes widened as she realized, "That means that students exert themselves more casting their spells"

Al nodded, "Correct, although we are not in Hogwarts, I am tempted to give you house points" he smiled at his own joke and shook his head before adding, "Your magic is not yet fully developed at eleven, so, your wand sizes average at ten to twelve inches, my wand" he picked his, "is fifteen and three quarter inches long because I got this when I turned twenty five, during that time, my magic was, more or less, fully developed, and even if it is not, the wand length is more than enough to compensate"

"But aren't you British?" Harry asked.

Al shook his head, "Technically, Harry, I am German" he replied, and then he smiled, "Though I was born and grew up in Britain and went to Hogwarts as well, its just that my first wand was not powerful

enough for me" he sighed and fondly remembered, "Ollivander was downright creepy, but he did give me my first wand, it was the same as Harry's, made of holly as well, but with dragon heartstring" he smiled "Poor thing lasted until I was twenty four, then it snapped after one too many skirmishes fighting supposedly dark creatures in the east" he sighed painfully, banishing any of his thoughts about his past life, "Anyway" he said, he waved his hand and target dummies appeared on the field in front of them, "Let's have some fun"

In the next two hours, Al had both Harry and Hermione cast curses at the dummies. The colorful lights concert must have attracted Dan as well, because as soon as they began, the shooting stopped and he joined Al in observing them.

They had a lunch break; thankfully, they had food that everyone is accustomed to this time, inside the house. Emma, who had spent most of her day in the library, joined them.

The topic during lunch was the coming hearing of Harry in regards to his use of the patronus while defending himself. As everyone had expected, Hermione was incensed that the British ministry had thought of this, and asked Harry who is representing him for the hearing.

"Anton Rosseu" Harry replied while taking a slice off the meat on his plate.

Hermione looked at Harry as if he was out of his mind, or at least, that was how Dan, Emma and Al termed the look, and then Hermione asked Harry, "Sorry, could you please repeat that"

"Anton Rosseu" Harry replied, he looked at Hermione, noted her expression that basically said 'I don't believe you', and cringed before adding, "I've never met with him yet, though Sirius and Remus thinks he is good and guarantees me that he would make all charges disappear"

"Harry" Hermione suddenly said, looking at her husband intently, "Did you know that your counsel is one of the ten magical lawyers, in the whole world, who is allowed to appear in court in polyjuice, or that no one knows whether Anton Rosseu is a man, woman, or whatever, and that no one knows how old he is" she then added, "The only way to confirm him is through his wand, " she closed her

eyes as she retrieved some facts from her mind, and then said, "his wand is made of redwood, reportedly with the hair of a nine-tailed fox as its core and is...." she paused as she opened her eyes and looked at Al, "fifteen and three quarter inches long"

Al smiled. He had no doubt that Hermione would make the connection, even if half the stories that Remus and Sirius had told him was true. After all, the girl who figured out that Remus is a werewolf should be able to figure out the supposed Anton Rosseu and Alvin York has something in common. "You're Anton Rosseu?" Hermione asked.

Al smiled, "Guilty as charged, my lady" he replied, "Did you know Hermione, that another way to know if the person in front of you is Anton Rosseu is to check his patronus" he lifted his wand and cast his patronus, which took the form of a fox, but with nine tails behind it, "After all, no two patronuses are alike, and Rosseu's is a nine-tailed fox"

Hermione frowned at Al, "Exactly how many identities do you have Al?" she asked. it was clear that while she did not think that Al would be a danger to Harry and herself, she does not like to be kept in the dark in regards to the number of his secret alternate identities.

"Around ten, give or take" Al replied, "I have a lawyer, an MI6 agent, which was my first alternate, a police officer, and many more," he smiled and said, "I do not keep track of all of them, but they come in handy when I need them, specially Rosseu"

Hermione nodded, he thought of asking Al if he was the one who had made all those prosecutions that made Rosseu famous, but then realized that he must be because of his patronus. That means that he was also the one who wrote all those magic legal novels that she had recently discovered. The thought of dining in the same table as a best-selling author who was not another Lockhart silenced Hermione well until after lunch when Al led them back to the range so that he may teach them a few advance defensive magic.

4 Privet Drive,

Surrey, England

Remus Lupin and Tonks, again, people use her first name at their peril, apparated in an alley near the house of Harry's relatives that ended in a wall. The two have received orders from Dumbledore to check on the house, ignoring the fact that the last team that he had sent there nearly had their heads shot off.

Both Remus and Tonks had protested about it, but Dumbledore was adamant on discovering why his wards are no longer working, so the two had no choice but to do so. Remus and Tonks, however, had decided that they would be very careful in this mission, so Tonks, using her metamorphagus ability, transformed herself into an archetypical British teen while Remus borrowed some of Sirius muggle clothes in the hopes that he can pass off as a typical British teen. The two hoped that they would pass off as a couple out for a late night stroll.

Remus and Tonks had studied countless British muggle couples for this mission, and they are both sure that they can act properly, so they were surprised when they reached Number Four and they came under fire.

Remus recognized the sound well enough, he had been training with firearms, to know that they are being fired upon by an automatic weapon. He managed to throw himself on the ground, pulling down Tonks with him, as bullets scythed less than three inches above them.

At that moment, pain shot out of Remus's left leg as he felt a bullet pierce through his skin and bury itself in his left thigh. As a werewolf, though, Remus was more than prepared for the pain, so he decided to check on Tonks first. He found her unconscious, and his first thought was that he was too hard when he pulled her down, so she must have bumped her head, but he instantly smelled the blood coming from her. He easily located the source, as he saw blood pooling on her lower torso.

Remus activated a portkey that took the two of them back to headquarters, where a raging Sirius, after being told of what had happened and seeing his cousin unconscious, immediately decided to withdraw himself from the Order, even if the original plan was to break from the Order after Dumbledore fails to find Harry. Before Remus can be ejected from the house, Remus also decided to withdraw from the Order after Sirius granted him permission to stay.

The two then decided to seek help from the only person that they know who is proficient in firearms, forcing them to take the emergency portkey that Sirius has kept to portkey to the Potter Manor at Rhineland.

Back at Privet Drive, Vernon Dursley shouted in triumph as he watched Remus and Tonks disappear. Unfortunately for him, his decision to turn the window of his kitchen into a firing slit for his bunker that is his house caught the attention of a real couple that is on a real night-time stroll.

The real couple had the misfortune of not only living in the same street as the Dursley's, they also had the misfortune of catching a few bullets in their limbs. Their screams and the loud racket of an automatic weapon firing woke the whole neighborhood, and within ten minutes, a full British Police assault team had blown the back door of the Dursley house and had roughly arrested Vernon and Petunia Dursley on charges of assault and violating the firearms law. Charges that would see them becoming guest in a six by six cell well into the new millennium.

As the police officers were collecting evidences from the kitchen, after all, there must be close to a hundred shell casings in the kitchen from the machinegun that Vernon had somehow gotten his hands on; one of them noticed a heavily padlocked door underneath the stairs. Thirty minutes later, social services were informed and additional cases were docketed. Vernon and Petunia Dursley were officially charged with assault, violating the firearms law, child abuse, and, since the amount of blood collected from the cupboard and the room was more than enough, and since they cannot find the boy, murder of one Harry James Potter.

It would be an unpleasant surprise if the Dursley's would be able to get out of their new accommodations alive.

A/N: In regards to the last note, I sort of run across this statement while I was looking for the characteristics of Hermione's wand, it was terribly irresponsible of me to place an unconfirmed source, but the statement may be found in the Harry Potter wiki.

SEVEN

Potter Manor

Rhineland, Germany

The night was quiet. It was broken by the occasional sound of an aircraft engine as the said aircraft droned overhead, and the occasional sound of animals going about their nightly ritual, but mostly it was quiet.

That made it the perfect opportunity for Harry and Hermione, sited in one of the balconies of the manor home, allowing them the perfect view of the moon, to just sit and talk about inconsequential stuff mixed with what the two of them plan to do for the rest of their lives. As the night wind blew past them, his arms are wrapped around her, hugging her in such a way that it sent an unspoken message that he would always be there for her, while her head was resting on his shoulder.

At the room that she shares with her husband, Emma was reading another book that she had found in the extensive library. She had initially thought that she would not be able to understand anything that was in the library because they all appear to be all about magic, so she was pleasantly surprised when Dobby found an entire section filled with muggle books and notes that Emma had never read before.

At the dinning room, Al and Dan were sited across each other, a half filled glass of red wine in the flat surface in front of them, and a half empty bottle of red wine that came from the estate itself between the two of them. Reminiscing about their past, the two men found that they can speak openly when they have something to drink between the two of them, and while they would have preferred something stronger, like brandy, perhaps, they are more than content with the bottle between the two of them. Their contemplative musings are occasionally broken by the sound of guttural laughter as the two men remember some of the funnier things that they have both went through while in the service.

Indeed, it was a quiet night.

In a single moment, this quiet was shattered as Sirius and Remus materialized in the front lawn of the Manor, behind them, a levitated stretcher where a barely breathing Tonks was resting.

As Sirius pounded on the front door of the manor with his enclosed fist while Remus gave all of his attention to Tonks, making sure that her breathing, no matter how shallow, was regular and that she is still alive.

Al opened the door, his expression showing that he is ready to beat the crap out of the person who is pounding on the door, even if he knew that it can only be one like him who serve the Potter family, or who is friends with the Potter family and their guests. The manor, after all, is protected by the most powerful wards that all the sentient magical species in the world can offer.

Upon seeing Sirius in the front door, Al's first reaction was to raise his eyebrows and ask him what the hell he is doing in Germany and what the hell happened to their diversion mission in London. When Al saw Remus, there was no change in the question that he wanted to ask, he just raised his other eyebrow, but when he saw what Remus was doing, everything else disappeared.

Trained as a soldier and a member of a Special Forces Unit, Al can smell the blood in the air, even if he does not have the same super smelling sense that Remus has.

"Dan" Al said as he rushed towards the stretcher, "Prepare for emergency surgery, if you will" Al pulled out his wand and began to summon some of the things that he thought they would need for this emergency surgery, "Ask Emma if she can join us, I think we need another medical professional, but make Harry and Hermione stay put"

Dan, who had followed Al to the front door nodded and turned back into the house to go about the suggestions that Al had given him.

Al, on the other hand, joined Remus and Sirius. The faces of the three men were turned on the young lady that was lying in front of them, blood pooling around her right leg and on her left thigh, "What happened?" Al asked as he applied pressure on the hole on the left thigh, Remus did the same with the right leg.

"Ambushed" Remus said as he hurriedly conjured a bandage, "We were checking out Number Four when the Dursley's opened fire at us" he shook his head, "Have no idea what the hell that bastard was holding Al, but he managed to cut me and Tonks down real quick"

Al nodded, he applied the bandages, specially designed by magic to exert pressure on the wound, and then turned towards Sirius "Order business?" he asked.

"order business" Sirius replied, nodding his head, he motioned to the lady that was still unconscious as a result of her wounds, and added, "She's my cousin, so I cannot just leave her"

"Got it" Al said, he nodded to Remus, who levitated the stretcher and they hurriedly entered the house. Remus set her down at the first flat surface that he can find that would serve as a table, and it just so happened that the first flat surface that would serve that he found was a hastily conjured, by Al, dinning table at the living room.

At that moment, Dan and Emma entered the living room, both carrying bags that the three wizards guessed contained all their things. Al knew that both are dentists, but they are the only medical professionals that hey can depend on right now, and while they are not used to this, Al knew that Dan has experience, seeing that he was pressed into surgery during the war while Al knew that Emma was a dental surgeon.

"What happened?" Emma asked, taking charge, she positioned herself before her patient, but in the process, removing Sirius, who had no idea what he is supposed to do.

"Ambush" Remus replied, he was pushed off his position by Dan, who examined the patient with his eyes, "Two bullet injuries"

"Dan" Al said, he removed the two bandages that he had placed on the wound, since they are already non-functional due to the amount of blood that they are forced to absorb, "Femoral artery on the left, nicked, the wound on the right is superficial compared to the one on the left"

Dan nodded, "We need to remove the bullet on both wounds" he said, he looked at Al and asked, "Can't you just remove them with magic?"

Al shook his head, "Summoning the bullet would be too damaging, we cannot pull the bullet recklessly," he explained, "We can banish and cauterize her limbs, but that would be a last resort" he looked at Sirius and Remus who both nodded, confirming his earlier statement, "If we can remove them using surgical means, or at least, with as least damage as possible, that would be preferable"

Dan nodded; he shook his head before he opened his bag to retrieve some tools.

At that moment, Harry and Hermione entered the room, the Potter heir said "Al" as he entered the room, and then he saw Sirius and Remus, both of whom covered in blood, "Sirius, Remus?" he asked, he clearly wanted to ask what happened, but at that moment, he saw Tonks lying on the surface.

"Sirius, Remus" Al said, "Take Harry and Hermione out of here" when both men hesitated, since they both clearly wanted to be in the living room when the surgery, make-shift as it may be, begins, Al looked at the two men and nearly shouted, "Go"

Both older wizards were not surprised in the commanding voice that their younger counter-part had used. They both nodded, and walked out of the room, taking Harry and Hermione with them.

"Al" Dan said as he mentally prepared himself for the coming operation, "We can remove the bullets, hopefully, but can we stabilize her after that?"

"We'll need more than morphine and IV's for this one" Emma said, she looked at the patient on the surface and added, "And we also need to move fast"

Al paused for a few moments, and then he nodded, "We'll need Harry's help for the next stage, I'm afraid, but we need to remove those bullets first if the patient can hope for any chance of survival" he sighed again before adding, "None of us know anything about healing magic, so we have to depend on muggle surgery," he explained, "if this was not so critical, I would have preferred sending her over to our healer, but she is in a location that, of all the people in this manor, only I, Harry and Hermione can enter, unless Harry gives permission and we haven't talked to him about it yet"

Dan nodded, "Right" he said, he turned to his wife and said, "I'll try to retrieve the bullet, Emma, I need you to apply external pressure on the surface of the wound, Al, I need you to watch over the patient"

The two assistants nodded their acknowledgement of their assignments and silently went about their task.

At the dinning room, both Sirius and Remus herded Harry and Hermione and asked them to sit with them. The two older wizards were delighted, or at least, as delighted as they could be given their condition, that there was a bottle of wine left on the dinning table. The moment that they took their seats, both adult wizards were given glass wines which they promptly filled to the brim.

Harry and Hermione watched the two adults as they proceeded to empty their first glass with one gulp, and the refill their glasses again, before Harry asked, "What happened?"

Remus turned to Harry and sighed, "Dora and I" he began, "were sent by the Order to investigate Privet Drive, we thought we had the perfect cover, we were a couple out for a moonlight stroll, but then, before we can even get close to the house, someone inside the house mowed us down" he sighed and added, upon seeing the expression on the face of Harry, "it was a muggle firearm Harry, not spell-fire"

Harry nodded, "Would she be alright?" he asked.

Sirius shook his head, "We don't know" he replied truthfully, and then he sighed before adding, "Dora is my cousin, Harry, and I cannot allow her to fall in the hands of the Old Bastard, so I thought I should bring her here"

"You did the right things Sirius" Harry said, he looked at Hermione, who silently gave her approval, before adding, "We can have her join this little group of ours once she is healed"

"Remus, Sirius" Hermione said, "Anyone of you knows healing magic?"

Both older wizards shook their heads, "Neither does Al" Remus admitted, "and the wound on Dora was critical, she may die, so Al decided to ask your parents for help" he emptied his wine glass with a single gulp as well, and then poured the remaining contents of the bottle into his glass, before adding, "Al knows that Dan has experience in make-shift surgery, while Emma is a dental surgeon,"

Harry and Hermione nodded, though both remained silent for the next half an hour. Occasionally, one of the four would take a glance at the wall clock hanging on the far wall to check the time, but none would speak.

The silence was broken when Al and Dan entered the room. Both men looked exhausted, and did not speak until they were seated at the table, "We've managed to remove both rounds" Al said, he sighed and then added, "5.56 from the looks of it, standard rifle issue, and it is highly illegal for a civilian to own a firearm in the United Kingdom without permit, I do not think that the Dursley's have them"

"She's stable for now" Dan added, "But we need to get her to a proper medical facility, or she won't make it"

Al sighed; he looked at Harry as he withdrew a key from his pocket. He placed the key in front of Harry, and said, "I need you to grant everyone here permission to go Potter Island, Harry" at the blank expression on the face of Harry, Al added, "only you, me and Hermione have permission right now"

Harry nodded, "I grant permission to everyone in this house to enter Potter Island" he said. Nothing happened, but Al was not disturbed by this fact, so, Harry decided not to ask the battle wizard anything about it.

Al stood up and took the key, "Let's go" he said. Everyone stood up and followed him to the living room where Emma was watching over Tonks. The senior Granger girl looked at the approaching party with raised eyebrows, but did not speak.

"We're going to Potter Island" Al said, he instructed everyone to form a circle around Tonks and hold hands, making sure that they are at least within five feet of Tonks, before he placed the key on Tonks. There was no incantation or wand movements involved in this

method of travel, it was one moment, they were standing in the living room of Potter Manor in the Rhine, the next, they were standing in another living room.

Unlike the living room in the Potter Manor in the Rhine, this living room was larger and more ornately decorated. A full hundred men could probably sit comfortably in this living room, and there would be room to spare for the ones who are forced to stand.

The Potter crest was also prominently displayed in this room, it was carved on the far wall, and flanking the crest was a banner, which also displayed the Potter crest, on the left and the flag of the United Kingdom on the right.

Beside the two flags were arched passageways that everyone guessed leads to the house itself. On the wall opposite the Potter crest was an ornately designed, and possibly hand-carved, wooden double door that everyone guessed leads to the outside world. The door was positioned in such a way that the Potter crest would be the first thing that anyone would see as they enter the house.

Barely five seconds have passed before the double doors leading to the outside world opened, and a man entered the room. He was dressed in jungle fatigues and had a rifle strapped behind his back, and despite the fact that he looked threatening, he smiled at everyone and asked, "Which one of you is Lord Potter?"

Before Harry can reply, Al cut him off, "We can discuss that later Hec" he said, he motioned to Tonks and said, "Alert sick bay that we have injured please"

The man that Al referred to as Hec nodded, and hurriedly left through the way that he came. He returned a few moments later, but this time, he was accompanied by four men, who were dressed in white uniforms that reminded everyone of a medic. The four new arrivals cast several spells to diagnose Tonks, before the apparent leader of the four turned to Al and reported, "We need to get her to the sick bay as soon as possible, Commander, she does not have that long if we tarry"

Al nodded, "Go" he commanded simply, he watched as the four gently levitated the stretcher where Tonks was lying down and as

the four hurriedly left the room through the double doors. Al looked at Sirius and Remus and then asked, "Would either of you accompany her?"

Remus nodded, "I would" he replied, Sirius was about to say that he would too, but Remus shot down the idea by saying, "Harry needs you here so you can explain some things that we purposely kept him in the dark of" he looked at Harry and said, "I promise that you would get all the answers soon"

Harry nodded, but before he can reply, Remus was already running after the medics who have taken Tonks, leaving behind the Granger party, Sirius, Harry, Al, and the man that Al had called Hec.

The man referred to as Hec was the first one to move, he looked at Al with a questioning look at his face, and then at Harry, before looking back at Al. He had already deduced who the Potter heir is by watching the conversation.

"Harry" Al said, and then he motioned towards Hec and said, "This is Hector William Boones, he is my second in command and is the caretaker of Potter Island while you were gone"

Hector bowed to Harry, "My Lord" he said, he brought himself up to full height, just two inches over six feet, making him taller than even Al, who was the tallest in Harry's party, "My name is Hector William Boones, but mostly everyone calls me Hec, and as you would have probably discerned from my accent, I was born in the United States"

Harry nodded; he extended his hand towards Hec, who took the offered hand, though he was, from the look on his face, undoubtedly surprised, "Harry Potter" Harry replied, "please call me Harry"

Hec looked at Al, who nodded, before he turned his attention back to Harry and smiled, "It would be an honor to call you Harry" he said.

"You already know Sirius" Al said, continuing with the introductions right after Harry and Hec let go of each others hands. Al motioned towards Hermione and added, "This is Hermione Granger" Al said, "She is Harry's fiancé, though they are already married in the magical world" and then at Dan and Emma, "My old friend, Daniel Granger, with whom I've served with during the Falklands Conflict, and his wife, Emma, Hermione's parents"

Hec smiled at all of them, "Welcome to Potter Island" he replied, inclining his head slightly towards each of them as they were introduced, "I understand that you came from Germany, we are four hours ahead of Germany, so you might have some problems adjusting, Lord...Harry" he quickly amended, as he turned towards Harry, "I understand that you have a house-elf?" and when Harry nodded, Hec said, "I would have your elf summoned here in the morning, but for now, please, get some rest," he smiled as he added, "We would have the tour tomorrow right after breakfast" he looked at Al and asked, "I think we can postpone their training for that?"

Al smiled, "That's fine" he replied.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

If there was one thing that Dumbledore hated more than anything, it was being disturbed in his sleep.

The Headmaster had gone to bed early that evening since he was sure that he would have to wake up early in the morning to take personal charge of the hunt for Harry Potter. He was so convinced that all of his problems would be solved if he can find the boy.

When the knocking on the door to his private chambers got too loud that even Dumbledore is unable to ignore them in his sleep, the old man sighed and stood up. After he gathered his cloak around his shoulders, he opened the door and found his old friend, Alastor Moody standing there.

Dumbledore invited the old fighter in, surprised at his appearance, and at the same time, anxious to know what it is that he is delivering that saw him, Moody, standing in front of the doors to the private chambers of Albus Dumbledore in the middle of the night.

"Alastor" Dumbledore greeted as soon as the two of them were sited in the private living room of Dumbledore, both of them holding cups of hot chocolate to keep them awake, "I am surprised since you never usually report this late"

"I thought that you would want to know as quickly as possible" Moody replied in his gruff voice, he looked at Dumbledore intently and said, "Tonks and Remus were ambushed by Potter's muggle relations, they have both disappeared"

Dumbledore dropped his cup, which promptly shattered upon making contact with the ground. A quick repairing charm and cleaning charm later, the cup was whole again, though the chocolate in it, gone.

"There's more" Moody said, "I think that they managed to return to Headquarters, Albus"

"Then what is the problem Alastor?" Dumbledore asked, showing open irritation at being disturbed in the middle of his sleep.

Moody raised his voice, he too was irritated, though the reason for his irritation was different than the one that Dumbledore has, "the problem" the old auror began "is that you forgot that Sirius and Tonks are cousins"

Dumbledore sighed, he sadly added, "So, Sirius has already left the Order"

Moody nodded, "And Remus went along with him" he added, "Not surprising, considering that he was her partner when they were fired upon, and I am betting that Tonks would follow both of them in leaving the Order"

Dumbledore nodded, "Do you think that they would return if we can find Harry?" he asked calmly, even though deep inside, the old man seethed. The Black Family fortune, something which Sirius controls, is necessary for him to see the completion of his plan. For that, he needs Sirius.

"I don't know" Moody replied, "but I do not think so" at the shocked look on the face of Dumbledore, Moody added, "Sirius and Remus are more inclined to believe Potter than you Albus, after all, in the case of Sirius, who was it that rescued them and who was it that stood in the side and allowed an incompetent minister of magic to nearly commit legal murder?" Moody did not allow his old friend to answer that question, instead, he continued, "Tonks would follow Sirius, even if family magic doesn't compel her"

"But Andromeda..." Dumbledore began.

Moody cut him off, "Even if that is the case, Sirius considers Tonks and her mother as his cousins, and Sirius is now head of the Black family, so family magic still works" he looked at Albus and said, "Without Sirius"

"We have no headquarters in London" Dumbledore concluded, he sighed and said, "For the time being, we'll make Hogwarts as our headquarters," he sighed and suggested, "I would speak with Harry during the hearing, offering him membership with the Order would mean that Sirius and Remus would return to us, and we can regain our headquarters"

"It's not that simple, Albus" Moody began.

Dumbledore cut him off, "You don't know Harry like I do, Alastor" he replied, he sighed, and in an almost sad voice, he added, "The Greater Good demands that he follow my lead"

"The boy is not your puppet" Moody replied.

Dumbledore nodded, but did not reply. Inside of him, however, Dumbledore seethed. He acknowledged that Harry is not yet his puppet, but that would change soon. Dumbledore made up his mind there and then to accelerate his plans regarding Harry and the youngest Weasley girl as soon as possible. He would ask Molly to help Ginevra prepare the love potion for Harry and Dumbledore would administer it during the hearing.

Even though Harry had chosen someone else to represent him for the hearing, Dumbledore was sure that he would be able to convince Harry to drink the potion. At the same time, the plan to get Hermione Granger for Ronald Weasley must also move forward. Dumbledore knows that he cannot afford to have the young witch question why Harry and Ginevra are suddenly very close.

Unfortunately, the only time that Dumbledore would have sure access to Hermione would be during the welcoming first. In the unlikely event, however, that the two would be together during the hearing, Dumbledore is planned to administer the love potion to both during the hearing. With luck, Dumbledore would have nearly

unlimited access to the Potter vaults again, and influence over the Black family vaults, at the end of the week after the hearing.

EIGHT

Potter Island

Location Unknown

Harry awoke in a sunshine filled room, following his best night's sleep that he could ever remember having. His sleep had been filled with pleasant dreams, and most of them centered on a beautiful young woman whom he now knew he would spend the rest of his life with.

He opened his eyes and took his surroundings into consideration. He was lying in a four poster bed that, while not as big as the one that he had at the Potter Manor in Germany, is still bigger than the one that he had at Hogwarts. The bed was also much more comfortable than the one at either location.

Feeling a pleasant warm weight on his chest, he smiled. There and then he realized that his comfort in this bed had nothing to do with the size of the bed itself, or of the room, but rather, it had everything to do with the person, whose head was lying on his chest, making use of it as her pillow, that is lying beside him.

Harry knew that her staying with him, spending the night with him and sleeping beside him, was the reason that his sleep was filled with pleasant dreams instead of nightmares.

For the first time since they were married, Harry and Hermione had shared their beds, and while they had not done anything yet, both knew that there is now no way that either of them would willingly climb into a bed without the other.

Harry felt his left arm under Hermione, and because she was lying on her stomach so that she may rest her head on his chest, his forearm actually touched her breasts, while said arm embraced her. His right arm was lying on his side, and Harry was not sure if his right hand had stayed there all night long while they slept, or if it had repositioned itself there while they slept.

Harry smiled as he decided that he would not wake up his sleeping wife, yet. Harry thought about that term, and as he did so, he never noticed as his right arm slowly started to gently stroke her hair.

A soft, contented sigh escaped from her lips as Harry stroked her hair with his hand. A few moments later, her left arm, which was thrown over Harry, slowly moved in such a way that it found itself touching Harry's face a few moments later. Right after that, Hermione opened her eyes.

"Good morning love" Harry said, and then he smiled at his wife.

"Good morning love" Hermione replied, and then she also smiled at her husband.

Despite the fact that both have no intention of moving their current positions, both know that if they do not make an appearance soon, they might find Hermione's parents in the room. Both Harry and Hermione would rather not have her parents in the room as they cuddled, despite the fact that they have received permission from her parents, and despite the fact that both of them spent the night together fully clothed.

A few moments later, Harry, wearing a casual white shirt, and Hermione, who, for some reason, had found Harry's jersey, walked into the dining room.

Unlike the dining room in the Potter Manor at Germany, this dining room was larger. The first thing that both married teenagers noted was the size of the dining table. It appeared to be made of wood, and it appeared to be more than capable of handling fifty people in one sitting.

At various intervals on the surface, there are centerpieces, all neatly arranged flower baskets that both suspected are changed everyday.

Already seated at the dining table, and appear to be breaking their fast, were Hermione's parents, Sirius, Remus, Al, and Hec, all of whom were engaged in conversation. The first person who noticed their entry, they were holding hands when they did, was Hec. He stood up to welcome Harry and Hermione, Hec was already aware of his relationship with Hermione, but he frowned when he saw that no one, not even Al, followed suit.

Harry smiled at the burly man and motioned for him to retake his seat. Once Hec was seated once again, Harry pulled a chair for

Hermione; picking one beside her mother, before he pulled a chair for himself, this one, he made sure was beside Hermione's. As soon as the two of them were seated, menus appeared in front of them, which they both discovered contained a listing of almost every breakfast combination in the world.

A worried Harry glanced at his wife, who smiled back at him, before shaking her head, silently telling him that she does not think any less of his family for employing House-elves, before she made her selection and announced that she would be having bacon and egg. A clearly relieved Harry decided to follow her choice and ordered the same.

They talked while they ate, which allowed Hermione to ask Al a question that had been bothering her since they went to Gringotts to take a look at the Potter finances.

"Al" she said, prompting the battle wizard and his second in command to look at her, the former with a questioning gaze while the latter with a neutral expression written on his face, "How can I be Heir of Ravenclaw when I am muggle-born?"

Al looked at both Sirius and Remus, who both shrugged, before he turned his attention back towards Hermione, "To tell you the truth, I have no idea as well" he admitted, he smiled at her before adding, for the battle wizard was sure that Hermione would not accept that easily, "I may have a theory that is plausible"

"May we hear it?" Harry asked right after he emptied the glass of, surprisingly good, orange juice that came with his breakfast. From the tone of his voice, no one would mistake his query as a demand, but rather, it was a request, which, for some reason, pleased both Al and Hec.

Al nodded, "Of course" he replied, he looked at Hermione and then said, "We believe that the line of Ravenclaw died sometime during the Hundred Years War", he sighed before looking at Hermione. Once he was looking at her, he added, "By 'died', we mean that every line that descended from her is gone"

"Then why...?" Hermione began.

Al cut her off with an apology before continuing, "Like all magical ancient families, there Ravenclaw line must never end, there must always be a successor, it matters little if the successor is full blood, half-blood, or first-generation, there must always be a successor"

"In your case" Al continued, he looked straight into Hermione's eyes, and continued, "According to Remus, you are the best student in terms of Academics that he has ever met, and your past academic records seem to lend credence to this observation"

"So I became heir because of that?" Hermione asked. From the look that she gave Al, it was obvious that she thought that that is too simple, "I mean, the sorting hat did consider putting me in Ravenclaw during my sorting, but..." she paused when she saw the look that Al shot at both Remus and Sirius, which disturbed her. She glanced at Harry, and found him undisturbed by her revelation, but then again, she told herself that that is probably because they talked about this last night. She looked at Al and asked, "Alright, what is it?"

Al looked at Hermione and apologized again, "I am sorry; I did not know about that" he replied, he smiled at her and added, "It is possible that even during your sorting, Ravenclaw had already recognized you as her possible heir, or..." he turned towards Hec, who shook his head, clearly, the burly American disagreed with what Al wanted to say, yet, Al continued, he turned towards Hermione and said, "It could be that we made a mistake with our approximation and you are descended from Ravenclaw" he sighed and shook his head, "We do not think, however, that this is the case"

"We would be checking nonetheless" Hec said, he glanced at Al, who nodded, before he turned his gaze back at Hermione, "I do not know when we would have the answer, but please, rest assured that we would have the answer"

Harry felt that his wife was adamant on knowing the answer to her question. As he is sited beside her, he felt her anxiety and he knew that she would volunteer to join the research. Since Harry knew that he cannot allow her to join, he held her hand, under the table, and she looked at him.

Harry slowly shook his head; she looked at him for a few moments, and then she nodded, conceding to his unspoken request that she leave the research work to Hec and his people.

"As Al had said, we do not think that we made a mistake with our approximation" Hec said, he looked at Hermione and added, "It could be that Ravenclaw recognized you as being a lot like her, so she chose you to be her heir."

Hermione nodded, "I would feel much more relaxed if you would be able to give me a specific answer" she said, she smiled at both Al and Hec before adding, "Please do not think that this is that important, I am just curious"

"I would be curious too if I was in your position" Al admitted, he looked at her for a few moments, just to make sure that she would not continue to ask questions under the umbrella topic, and then announced when he was sure that there would be no more questions in regards to the Ravenclaw heir, "After breakfast, we would be having a grand tour of the island," he explained, "Everyone is, of course, invited, but Harry and Hermione" at this, he inclined his head towards the two, "are required to join the tour" the battle wizard wisely did not chose to add the reason, for he was sure that if he did, Dan would throw a tantrum.

Thirty minutes later, after everyone was finished with their breakfast, Al led Harry and Hermione to a waiting Land Rover Snatch outside the driveway of the mansion. Dan and Emma had decided to accompany them for the tour, but Remus and Sirius decided that they would have the tour some other time and would rather head to the infirmary to check up on Tonks.

This was the first time that Harry and Hermione are out of the mansion, so before they climbed aboard their transport vehicle, the two decided to look at the house first. It was a white colonial mansion with three floors finished in the Georgian style.

Once they are inside the vehicle, Hec, who was the designated driver, pulled out of the driveway of the mansion and into a paved two lane road, flanked by tall thick trees, that led away from the house, while Al started speaking, "Potter Island" he began, "has been the home of Lord Potter since the 1700's. While Potter Lords are born, usually, in Britain, this is usually where they grew up"

"Where are we exactly Al?" Dan asked, Al looked at him with an expression of disbelief, and he noticed that there was something wrong with his question, so he amended it to, "Where in the surface of the planet, assuming that we are still in the planet"

Al laughed, at the same time that he did, the trees on both sides of the road disappeared, allowing them a view of their surroundings. On the right side of the road was a beach, and Harry felt his eyes widen when he saw a seemingly endless blue, while on the left side of the road, there was a small airfield, complete with small and medium airplanes.

"Welcome to the British Indian Ocean Territory" Al said, trying, and failing, to keep the mirth off of his voice, he looked directly at Dan and said, "Diego Garcia is a few kilometers north east of our position, but they do not bother us here"

The first stop of their tour was a collection of buildings that reminded Harry and Hermione of a military camp. After their tour of the place, where both Harry and Hermione met and talked with a few men and women that Al told him are members of the force that protects the Potter heir, the two teenagers had to amend their thoughts. The collection of buildings does not resemble a military camp, it is a military camp.

"This camp accommodates nearly one thousand men and women" Hec explained as they continued their tour of said camp on foot, they passed a range where men and women wearing military fatigues were shooting at targets, "Usually, around five hundred men and women are here in any given time of the year," he looked at Harry and explained, "This is our primary training camp, everyone who carries the Potter crest on their uniforms went through this place, and they usually come back here every year for proficiency training"

Al saw the blank look on the face of Harry and Hermione, so he explained, "Being proficient in firearms is not an easy process, Harry, and not all of your mansions and houses around the world have firing ranges, so they come back here for training in case they feel that their skills are rusty" he smiled and added, "and there is also an annual shooting competition every six months"

"We have a mess here capable of sitting five hundred people in one go" Hec said, "Our shooting range is six times the size of the range in Germany, and can handle rifle and even machinegun training"

"What about magical training?" Hermione asked.

Al replied, "Not all of us are witches or wizards Hermione" he explained, and then he motioned towards Hec, "Hec here is not a wizard, though all of us are capable of defending ourselves from magical attacks" he sighed before continuing, "We do this by teaching all of our people about the magical world"

"Would that not violate the International Statute of Secrecy?" Hermione asked, she looked at Al and said, "That would mean trouble with the International Confederation, wouldn't it?"

Al shook his head, "We have acquired a license from the ICW long before Lemon-Drop became the chief warlock there" he explained, he smiled before he added, "We have had a license to show our people about magic since the 1500's"

"Even if all the wizards and witches in the world were to attack us here" Hec said, "they would not get past our defenses" he looked at Harry and Hermione and added, "We would be visiting the Defense Headquarters later, after our tour of the magic training grounds"

Hec led them back to where they had parked their vehicle so that they may go to their next stop.

The magical training ground was nothing like boot camp, as Al had called the previous camp that they had visited. The magical training ground was a single white building that was five stories high. The first thing that Harry and Hermione noted when they entered the building was that it does not look anything like a magical school at all, more; it actually resembled the lobby of a hotel, but without the counters.

"This is where we train our magic-capable people and where we show our non-magical-capable people what magic is all about" Hec said, "The purpose of showing non-magical people what magic is, as Al had told you a while ago, to make them familiar with what people that they may likely face are capable of"

"Everyone goes through this place as well" Al said, he smiled fondly as he said, "I trained here along with several others when I was younger, and when I graduated, I taught here as well"

Hec smiled, he looked towards Harry and Hermione and whispered to them, as Al reminisced by looking fondly at the walls of the classroom that they have entered, "He is a much more better teacher of mundane arts" he said.

"I heard that" Al said, he looked at his second in command and said, "Just because you cannot do what I do does not mean that you can insult me in front of our boss" he sighed and turned towards Harry and Hermione, "When we resume training, I expect that you would sit in classes here, but I do not think that that would be a regular thing" Al saw the expression on the faces of Harry and Hermione, begging for further explanation, so he continued, "Most of the classes in here are for showing people what magic combat is all about, there are very few pure magic classes"

"Since we are capable of magic, we need specialized training?" Harry asked.

Al shook his head, "No" he replied, he paused for a few moments, and then added, "We do teach our magic capable people some advance spells in here, as well as magical combat, but this magical training ground is meant for understanding, and not for using, magic in combat" he smiled as he added, "Most of our people would rather fight with guns rather than with wands, and we include our magic-capable people in that"

"Since the two of you are not yet capable of fighting like us" Al continued, "and since you are still in school, no matter how stupid and despicable your Headmaster is, you have to learn basic and advance spells, dueling, the works"

"Can't we just withdraw from Hogwarts?" Harry asked.

Al shook his head, "Unfortunately" Al began, "Harry, you are descended from the line of Gryffindor, and Hermione" he turned towards Hermione, "Even if we are not sure why, you are descended from the line of Ravenclaw, you both must complete your education at Hogwarts"

"What happens if we don't?" Hermione asked.

Al looked at Hec, and then back at Harry and Hermione. He explained, "Hogwarts is more than just a school, it is a magical being in itself, with limited intelligence, kind of like a baby. Hogwarts grows every year, but if two of the descendants of the founders decided that Hogwarts is not good enough, the school dies"

"This should bother us why?" Harry asked, he looked at a horrified Hermione, and it was obvious that he was surprised by her reaction, before he turned back towards Al and continued, "So what if the school dies?"

"Harry" Hermione admonished,

Before she can continue with what she was supposed to say, however, Al cut her off, "For starters, knowledge would be lost" he said, and then he sighed, "Do you know about the House-elves in Hogwarts?" both Harry and Hermione nodded, "They would be out of work, and would slowly die" at the blank expression on the faces of both Harry and Hermione, Al explained, "House-elves feed off their bond with their masters"

"It's not slavery?" Hermione asked.

"In the strictest sense, no" Al replied, he saw the look on the face of Hermione, so he explained, "Yes, it might look like slavery, but only because House-elves, in Britain, have no recourse when it comes to abuse, not like in other countries" he shook his head for emphasis, "no, the relationship is more like a mutually beneficial relationship, the master gets a servant who is enthusiastic about cleaning, while the servant feeds off the bond"

"I have no idea" Hermione said.

"Hermione" Al said, "You're muggle-born, of course, you had no idea" he smiled and added, "Hell, half the pure-bloods who have house-elves have no idea as well" he turned his attention back at Harry, "Going back to Hogwarts, their elves would lose that bond, and while many may be able to find new bonds, there would be those who would be unable to"

"Harry" Hermione said, she looked at her husband and said, "We have to go back"

Harry did not hesitate, he just nodded, "We would return" he declared.

Al nodded, he led them back towards their parked vehicle and they headed towards their next destination for the day.

Their next destination for the day was the Defense Headquarters, which Hec explained is the brain of the many defenses surrounding the island. Compared to the magical training ground, it was a small building, just a single floor and very small, though there are huge antennas and what appeared to be a radar dish in the area.

When they entered the building, they realized why the building just has one floor.

"Underground bunker" Dan commented, he pointed at a set of staircase that go down.

Al nodded, "The British Army built this bunker back when they occupied the island during the Cold War" he explained, "They turned it over to us and we modified it a little to serve as our headquarters" he led them down the staircase that Dan had pointed earlier, and they found themselves in a room filled with consoles and people operating them, "Welcome to the nerve center of our operations here in Potter Island"

There was a digital map of the entire island opposite the door that the party had just used to enter the place. Everyone looked at the map and saw that the island was far bigger than they had thought earlier, and, according to the map, the island is self-sufficient for its basic needs, as there are numerous farms located on the far side of the island. Processed products, however, had to come from somewhere and to that effect, there was a deep-water port on the other side of the island as well.

"Our first defense line is a ward line five kilometers off of our shore" Hec explained, he pointed at an uneven red line in the digital map that surrounded the island on all sides, "It is non-lethal, but serves as a good warning, it is good enough to allow radar to have a look-see at the approaching target"

"If it is civilian, then we do nothing, but if it is hostile, we usually do either of two things" Hec continued, "If the target is riding a broom, then we scramble our old attack helicopters and buzz them"

Harry smiled, imagining himself flying his broom and trying to get away from a helicopter.

"If it is not on a broom" Hec continued, "We pass it on to Diego Garcia and they take care of it for us"

"Hec" Harry said, "What exactly is Diego Garcia?"

"It's an American operated airbase located near here Harry" Hec replied, "it is an important post for the United States here in the Indian Ocean, so they are pretty tedious in guarding it"

Harry nodded.

Al led them back to their vehicle after speaking with a few of the operators in the base. They continued their tour of the island after that, they visited the far side of the island and saw the farms there that allowed the island to be self-sufficient as well as the deep-water facilities that allow the island to import some essential resources, like oil. By the time that they returned to the manor house, the sun had already set and dinner was waiting for them at the dinning room.

During dinner, Hermione decided to ask Al a question that had been bothering her since she was told by her husband about how he was treated in his aunt and uncle's home. She turned her attention towards Al, who had just finished cutting a portion of the steak that he had ordered for his dinner, and said, "Al, may I ask you a question?"

From the seriousness in her voice, the battle wizard guessed that the question that she was about to ask is pretty important. Al placed his knife and fork down on his plate and looked at Hermione, "It sounds serious, so go ahead"

Hermione nodded, "All of this belongs to my husband right?" she asked, and when Al nodded, she continued, "And the men and women we met today, specially the ones at the camps, they are loyal to him?"

"Not yet" Al replied, "they are loyal to the Potter family, but not to Harry, they have not sworn an oath to him yet"

"And you then?" Hermione asked.

Al nodded, "I swore an oath to protect Harry when he was a baby, yes" he replied, he looked at Hermione and sighed, but before she can continue with her question, Al said, "I know what you want to ask, Hermione, you want to know why I never came to his aid in the past fourteen years"

Everyone looked at Al, and he sighed, he decided to ignore the others and look at Hermione, "I promise to answer that question, but for the time being, I would like to ask a compromise" he said the last to Harry.

"Go ahead" Harry said.

"Your underage magic hearing next week is important" Al said, he sighed before he continued, "As Anton Rosseu, I have to defend you, and I need you to trust me during that time, so I would like to ask you, and everyone here, to allow me to explain why I have not come to your aid after the hearing"

Harry looked at Hermione, but she looked at Al and said, "You are afraid that the story would destroy Harry's trust in you?"

Al shook his head, "That may be a small part of it" he admitted, he sighed before adding, "But the bigger part of it is that I am not sure if I would be able to concentrate tomorrow if I were to narrate all of this today" he tried a tentative smile as he added, "I tend to get drunk whenever I remember what I did those past few years that I spent in the East"

Hermione looked ready to continue her interrogation, but before she can say another word, she felt Harry's hand on hers, she looked at him and he silently shook his head, silently telling her not to continue. Hermione looked at her husband for a few moments, and then she finally relented and nodded, "Dinner time after the hearing then" she said.

Al nodded, "I promise"

Help Wanted

A beta-reader is someone who helps the writer improve. Towards that end, I have been told and I know that I need one and would like to request any interested parties to please contact me. Thank

NINE

Potter Island

British Indian Ocean Territory

The final week before the hearing passed by without that much incident.

After he gave his promise that he would tell his story to everyone after the hearing, no one bothered Al about his past. Everyone in the family, as Harry now refers to Hermione, Dan, Emma, Sirius, and Remus, accepted the compromise that Al had engineered for them.

On their third day on the island, two days after their tour, Tonks regained consciousness enough to wonder where she is. Fortunately, Remus was there on her bedside when she did, and he was able to tell her all about the incident that saw the two of them shot, before she slipped back into sleep. The doctor in charge of the infirmary, whom Harry and Hermione had witnessed, being harassed by Sirius more than once, had assured everyone that this is normal and that Tonks is on her way to a full recovery.

On the fourth day, Harry and Hermione, as well as Dan and Emma, were able to introduce themselves to the downed auror, who was happy to meet Harry Potter, though her eyes did not automatically shoot up to the famed lightning bolt scar on Harry's forehead. Harry suspected that Sirius and Remus had also informed Tonks that they are withdrawing from the Order, since the auror had informed them that she would be withdrawing as well.

For the most part, training continued for Harry and Hermione. Only this time, instead of running ten kilometers every day with Al, they are running five with Hec. It might seem to be a boon, but the truth is, Al had allowed Hec to shorten the route because Hec had insisted that Harry and Hermione run with full packs.

As Al had promised before, however, the battle wizard did teach them some new tricks with their wands, as well as how to use firearms and fencing, which Harry and Hermione found that they are adept at, though neither Harry nor Hermione would want to spar with him, even if they are together against him. Both had witnessed the

sound trashing that Al had handed to fifteen men on their second day when the battle wizard dueled with them on one go.

Dan had taken to reviewing and re-familiarizing himself with the various firearms in the island. He had been witnessed training with the new recruits on the range.

Emma, on the other hand, had taken to reading. The library in the island manor house was considerably bigger than the one at Germany. She, however, was seen accompanying her husband one time at the range and was known to have fired a few rounds herself. Apparently, Dan had insisted that she learn as well.

Sirius and Remus also taught Harry and Hermione whenever they are available. Sirius taught transfiguration, showing both Harry and Hermione some OWL standard spells, as well as NEWT standard spells. The same was true for Remus, though in his case, he was teaching charms. Both men had expressed confidence that Harry and Hermione would get perfect, or at least, near perfect, marks for their OWL's in the subjects that they taught.

Finally, the day of the hearing arrived.

"Are you sure that you won't need me there" Sirius said as Al joined Harry, Hermione, Hec and two men and a woman, those that have been chosen by Al to join them for this mission, in the living room.

Harry looked hopeful that Sirius would be able to join them for this one, it was obvious that his godfather wanted to come, even if only in his dog form.

Al shook his head, "I'm sorry Sirius" Al said, he placed his right hand on the right shoulder of Sirius before adding, "You know very well what would happen should those idiots discover you" he smiled, "I promise that I would humiliate Fudge and the rest of his cronies though, not to mention Lemon-Drop"

Sirius nodded, "Give them hell" he said, he then gave both Harry and Hermione a wink before he wished everyone in the mission luck.

A few moments later, the party of seven found themselves in the living room of Potter Manor in Britain. "Okay, listen up" Al said as soon as he was sure that everyone has their bearings straight, he

glanced at his wristwatch, which automatically adjusted to London time, and said, "This may not be a firing mission, but this is an operation nonetheless, I expect nothing less but perfect performance for my people" Hec, and the other bodyguards that Al had brought along stiffened at that remark, but the battle wizard ignored them and turned towards his two charges, he spoke first with Hermione, "Hermione" he said, "you know that I did not want you to accompany us for this one, and your parents agreed with me, but we cannot stop you"

Hermione nodded, Al sighed, "I want you to stay with Francesca at all times" he motioned to the only other female in the group, "She would be your bodyguard for this op, along with Marcus here" Al motioned to one of the guys.

Hermione nodded, "I also know not to accept anything that anyone save for the two of them would offer me" she added, "And I have a sidearm with me, though I hope that I would not have to use it"

"Good" Al nodded, the smile on his face was an indication that he was pleased with the initiative that Hermione was showing. When the battle wizard turned towards Harry, his smile broadened as he saw that his primary charge was also showing the initiative that he had expected.

"Harry" Al said, "I would be your bodyguard, lawyer and counsel for the day" he grinned, "I would, of course, be Anton Rosseu, but its fine to call me Al" Harry nodded, "Also the same reminders for you, do not, I say again, do not, accept anything that does not come from me or from anyone in our group," he sighed, before he turned his attention to both Harry and Hermione, "We know that Lemon-Drop is planning on dousing both of you with his love potions, our intelligence had confirmed as much, so we cannot be too careful"

Both Harry and Hermione nodded. Al turned towards Hec and the other man who have not been given a specific objective, "Hec and Andrew" Al said, "You are with our audience, since I am sure that there would be many of them, charged with trying to find anyone who might take a potshot at us" both men nodded, "Non-lethal confrontation only, use your imagination" again both men nodded, before Harry turned his attention back towards Harry, "I expect that there would be a lot of media there, mostly international" at the dejected look on the face of Harry, Al said, "Don't worry, most of

them would be more interested in me than you, this is the first time that Anton Rosseu is in Britain, after all, and we could use them to our advantage"

Harry nodded, but he had a question, "What about the representative from the Daily Prophet?" he asked, "I know that they've been taking potshots at me"

Al smiled, "Sure, the people in Britain are inclined to believe that dishrag, but most people outside Britain would believe their own papers, and if we are extremely lucky, which I think we are, we would be graced with the presence of a representative from the Magical Time Magazine, which the delegates in the ICW believe more than their own mothers"

Harry looked unconvinced, and no one among the party would blame him. After all, he had never had pleasant experiences with the media before.

Al glanced at his wristwatch once more before he turned his attention back towards his party, "In two minutes, Harry and I would floo to the ministry, no sense in using the visitors entrance, five minutes later, Hermione, Francesca, and Marcus would floo in, followed a minute later by Hec and Andrew"

Ten minutes later, Harry found himself together with Al in a very long and splendid hall with a highly polished, dark wood floor. Halfway down the hall was a fountain. A group of golden statues, larger than life-size, stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest among the statues was a noble-looking wizard, his wand pointed straight into the air. Grouped around him were a beautiful witch, a centaur a goblin, and a house-elf. The last three all looked adoringly up at the witch and wizard. Glittering jets of water were flying from the tips of the wands, and the arrow of the centaur among others, adding the hiss of the falling water to the pops and cracks of Apparators and the clatter of footsteps as hundreds of witches and wizards, most of whom wearing glum looks, as they strode towards a set of golden gates at the far end of the hall.

"This way" Al said.

Al and Harry joined the throng. As they passed by the fountain, Harry saw silver Sickles and Bronze Knuts glinting from the bottom of the pool.

"Over here" Al said. They stepped out of the stream of Ministry employees headed for the golden gates. They headed towards a desk on the left of the gates, over which, hung a sign which read 'security'. A badly shaven wizard in peacock-blue robes looked up as they approached and put down his Daily Prophet.

"Good morning" Al said pleasantly, "We are here for a hearing"

The bored looking wizard nodded, "Step over here" he said in a bored voice.

Al decided to let Harry go first as he looked back at the throng. He was able to identify Hermione, Francesca and Marcus as they floo into the hall, but he did not acknowledge them. There would be ample time for that later. He just wished that Francesca and Marcus would be able to control Hermione from running towards them, for the sake of the plan; no one must know that Harry and Hermione are legally married this early.

The bored looking wizard in charge of the desk looked Harry up and down; fortunately, he completely missed the tell-tale lightning bolt scar on Harry's forehead. Once he was satisfied with how Harry looked, the guard stretched his right hand towards him, "Wand" he said.

Harry produced his wand. The wizard dropped it onto a strange brass instrument which began to vibrate. After a few moments, a narrow strip of parchment came speeding out of it. The wizard tore the parchment off and read the writing upon it, "Eleven inches, phoenix-feather core, been in use, four years, that correct?" he asked.

"Yes" Harry replied.

"I keep this" the wizard said, he impaled the slip of parchment on a small brass spike, "you get this back" he added, returning the wand to Harry, before motioning for Al to enter.

Al was carrying a briefcase, which meant that his look-see was considerably longer. Harry was able to see what was inside the silver briefcase that Al was carrying, and his eyes bulged when he saw that his counsel has a submachine gun in his briefcase, but the confused guard just looked it over, produced some sort of instrument that looked like a car antenna, and used said instrument to scan the weapon.

Harry guessed that the instrument is used to detect magic, since it did not go off when it touched the small submachine gun that Harry recognized as an MP-5K. The wizard guard looked at Al as he motioned towards the weapon, "Water container" Al said with a straight face, he smiled and leaned in closer to the guard, as if he does not want anyone to know what he was about to say, "Latest craze in the mainland, man, every kid wants one, and my mama says that I am a kid at heart, so to irritate her, I brought myself one"

The guard took Al's word for it, Harry guessed that the bored wizard had never heard, let alone seen, a gun before, "I wish I could buy one for my kid then" the guard said. He looked at the case once more and then closed it himself before he demanded Al's wand.

Al handed him his fifteen inch wand, which surprised the guard, but nonetheless, took the said wand and dropped it into the same instrument that tested Harry's wand. A few moments later, another piece of parchment came out at the base of the instrument and the guard read from it.

"Fifteen and three quarter inches, nine-tailed fox hair core, been in use for about five years?" the guard asked, he looked at Al, who nodded, before adding, "Guess that you are Anton Rosseu then?" and when Al nodded again, the guard continued, "You have press contingents from Europe and America asking for you, Mr. Rosseu"

Al smiled, he glanced at his charge and then back at the guard, "Can we go now?"

"Sure" the guard smiled, he carefully, almost reverently, returned Al his wand.

Al led Harry into a lift, which was filled with people. Every time the lift would stop at a particular floor, a pleasant sounding female voice would announce the floor number and what one can find in the said

floor. Al and Harry, they were the only ones left in the lift, left the lift at the second floor, but they had barely taken a step out when a large, black man with an intimidating gaze handed Al a piece of paper.

Al took the paper, read from it, and Harry watched as his eyes widened. Al looked at the man who gave him the paper, a question evident on his face, but before he can ask the question, the black man nodded, and Al turned around and led Harry back to the lift.

"What was that about?" Harry asked as soon as the doors of the lift were close and the lift was moving again.

"That was our spy inside the Ministry and one of ours inside the Order" Al replied, he cursed before adding, "Fudge is playing us for a fool," he handed Harry the paper that the spy had handed him, but before Harry can read it, Al said, "Rescheduling the hearing so that you would arrive late? Asking for a full trial for a simple case of underage magic? I've never seen anyone as incompetent as this bastard before" he shook his head angrily and then he smiled, "No matter, he just made a big mistake," he looked at Harry and smiled, "We have the international press with us, and that incompetent bastard has no choice but to let them see this"

Harry nodded, but did not say anything. They found themselves a few moments later at a dungeon like place that reminded Harry of the Hogwarts dungeon. They entered a room and Harry's eyes widened once more as he recognized the place where he would be having his hearing. He has been here before.

A cold male voice rang across the courtroom, "You're late"

"Sorry" Harry said.

Harry sat at a chair located on the middle of the hall. He had watched as the chains on the chair bind people during the time that he had spent in the pensieve, but the chains did not move. He looked at the people seated at the bench above while Al took a seat beside him in a much more normal looking chair.

The first group of people that he noticed was a group wearing plum-colored robes with an elaborately worked silver W on the left-hand

side of the chest and all of them staring down their noses at him, some with very austere expressions, others, looks of frank curiosity.

Among these group, Harry recognized Cornelius Fudge, the minister of Magic. A portly man who often sported a lime-green bowler hat, he also sprouts nonsense on his mouth and, as Sirius had said, is the worst minister of magic that world has ever seen.

The second group, Harry noted included Hermione. She was sited in the middle of her two bodyguards, the man called Marcus on her left, while Francesca on her right. Harry also noted that both Marcus and Francesca were carrying the same briefcases as Al, and he guessed that the two are also packing.

He noted with extreme pleasure that the Weasley's are with this group, but that they are unable to even move towards Hermione since both Marcus and Francesca are shooting them with undisguised hostile looks.

The third group that he noticed made Harry's heart sunk. As he observed them, however, he noted that, as Al had said, most of the attention of the international press was at Al himself, or, in this case, Anton.

Harry did not notice where Hec and his partner, Andrew, are. He guessed that they are doing their job and observing, so he did not look for them anymore.

"Very well" Fudge said, "the accused being present – finally – let us begin. Are you ready?" he called down the row.

"Yes, sir" said an eager voice that Harry knew. Percy Weasley was sitting at the very end of the front bench, a quill poised in his hand and a parchment in front of him.

"Disciplinary hearing, of the twelfth of August" Fudge said in a ringing voice, as Percy began taking down notes, "into offenses committed under the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery and the International Statute of Secrecy by Harry James Potter, resident at number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey."

"Interrogators, Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister of Magic, Amelia Susan Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, Court Scribe, Percival Ignatius Weasley"

"Representing the Defense, Your Honors" Al said, he stood up from his seat beside Harry, "Anton William Rosseu, late of Bavaria, recognized by the International Confederation of Wizards"

Fudge nodded, and Harry noted that he looked afraid for a few moments. He wondered whether it was because of who Al is, or if it was because of the fact that right after Al introduced himself as Anton Rosseu, every newspaperman in the galley stood up and began taking pictures.

"Yes" Fudge said after a few moments, he shuffled his notes and said, "Well, then. So. The charges. Yes"

He extricated a piece of parchment from the pile before him, took a deep breath, and read, "The charges against the accused are as follows: that he did knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of the illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Minister of Magic on a similar charge, produced a Patronus Charm in a muggle-inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle...." Fudge drowned on and Harry noted with glee that some of the newspapermen in the benches tried, and failed, to stifle yawns.

"You are Harry James Potter, of number four, Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey?" Fudge asked.

"Yes, but -" Harry replied after Al nudged him.

"You received an official warning from the Ministry for using illegal magic three years ago, did you not?"

"Yes, but -" Harry replied.

"And yet, you conjured a patronus on the night in question?"

"Your Honors" Al suddenly said, "I would like to ask how we are going to find out the facts if the honorable" and he said that with sarcasm, though very few can hear it, "minister of magic is not going to allow my client to fully explain his actions in this court"

"Mr. Rosseu, you are not of this court, so please do not interrupt the Minister" a fake sweet voice, Harry noted that it came from a toad, said.

"Madam Undersecretary" Al said, again, he was faintly sarcastic when he said that, "I am the counsel chosen by my client to represent him for this hearing, I am fully entitled by law, both British and International, to protect the legal rights of my client. Minister Fudge's failure to hear the full story from my client is an indication of the fact that he had already decided to declare him guilty, my client wishes to tell this honorable court what happened the night in question in his own words, yet, the honorable Minister Fudge refuses" he turned towards the head of the DMLE, and asked, "Has the right to be presumed innocent till proven guilty been repealed in the British Isles, Madam Bones?"

Harry saw that Umbridge was about to say something, but then thought better of it when she noticed the reports taking down notes.

"No it has not" Madam Bones replied, she glared at Minister Fudge and then turned towards Harry and, in a gentle tone that reminded Harry of a mother trying to coax a kid to tell his story, Madam Bones said, "Please tell us the full story Harry"

Harry nodded and he narrated what happened the night in question. He noted that while Madam Bones was interested, very few in the assembly were. When he got to the Dementors attacking him, Harry noted the silent fury written in the face of the Head of the DMLE, but before she can say anything, Fudge said, "You are a liar aren't you boy?"

"Objection" Al said, standing up.

"Sustained" Madam Bones replied, she glared once more at Minister Fudge, before stating, "Minister, remember yourself" and she purposely failed to disguise inclining her head towards the media.

Harry nearly laughed when he saw the color drain from Fudge's face. Al, on the other hand, remained impassive as he watched the same thing. He knew that Fudge had just made a grave mistake and he would be seeing his ratings going down in the next few weeks.

Fudge nodded, but he still glared at Harry as he said, "A well rehearsed story like that would not fly in this court, Mr. Potter"

Al stood up again, Harry noted that Fudge actually looked afraid as Al said, "Madam Bones, may we introduce evidence to this court that would confirm the claim of my client?"

Madam Bones nodded, "Please" she replied.

Fudge nodded. He was so sure that Harry was guilty that when the memory of Harry of that night was shown, he was as pale as the ghosts of Hogwarts.

"But..." Fudge began.

"If I may" a voice from the back said. Everyone turned their attention towards the source of the voice and found Dumbledore standing up, "I would like to know what Dementors are doing there?"

Madam Bones shook her head, "I do not know" she admitted.

"Then perhaps..." Dumbledore began, but Al cut him off, "Professor Dumbledore" Al said, "While I respect your intelligence and your knowledge, I have to say that I do not respect your personality, this is my case and you are not a party to this"

"Mr. Rosseu is right Professor" Madam Bones said, "Please sit down"

A defeated Dumbledore did so, but not before he glared at Al, who just smirked at the Headmaster of Hogwarts. Unknown to Dumbledore, a picture of him sulking after being told, basically, to shut up, was taken by one of the reporters in the benches.

"Minister Fudge" Madam Bones said, "Do you have any questions?"

"Hem, hem" the same sickly sweet, and obviously faked, voice said, "Excuse me, Madam Bones, I have a question for the defendant"

Madam Bones nodded, and the toad, whom Harry learned was named Dolores Umbridge, said, "Mister Potter, are you perhaps suggesting that the Ministry has ordered an attack on your person?"

Al, who was drinking, Harry suspected that it was on purpose, laughed, spewing water all over the ground in front of him. A few moments later, most of the people, including Umbridge's own colleagues, joined in the mirth.

"Madam Undersecretary" Al said after he finished wiping his face with his handkerchief, "With all due respect, madam, are you stupid?" Harry watched as Umbridge reddened, but before she can say anything, Al continued, "We've already shown this honorable court what happened that day, now you are asking us if we are implying that the Ministry has ordered the attack? Who else can order those Dementors around? Voldemort perhaps?" Al ignored the shudder of most of the assembled people, "but according to your government, he is dead, killed, by my client here when he was but a babe, and Professor Dumbledore, misguided as he is when it comes to child welfare, has a well-documented hatred of these creatures" Dumbledore reddened as well, but again, before he can say anything, Al continued, "By process of elimination, who else do you think is left? I would like to say Voldemort, I have seen the memories of my client of that event after all, in fact, I saw several of Minister Fudge's friends in there as well, but since your government is denying that he has returned, then it means that we have no choice but to believe that your government ordered the attack"

"Mr. Rosseau" Madam Bones warned.

"I apologize for my outburst, Madam Bones" Al replied, he looked at the head of the DMLE and replied, "I did not mean to insult the British Ministry of Magic as a whole, only those who apparently, are unqualified to sit"

"Excuse me" Dumbledore suddenly said, he stood up as well, "I would like for you to retract your earlier statements in regards to myself and my actions" he looked at Harry and then back at Al, before he said, "You and I are on the same side here, we both want to protect Harry"

Al shook his head, "You misunderstood me then, professor, but then again, we actually haven't filed the action yet" he said, he looked at Harry, who nodded, before he looked at Madam Bones, "Madam Bones" Al said, "Mr. Potter is going to file a child abuse case against his legal guardians in the muggle world this week," Dumbledore paled, "and at the same time, we are going to file an action for gross

negligence and willful disregard of law against one Albus Dumbledore for placing him with said relatives, thus, subjecting my client to more than ten years of abuse"

"Mr. Rosseu..." Dumbledore began.

"Professor Dumbledore" Madam Bones said, "Please sit down, or I would have my aurors remove you from this court" Dumbledore did so.

Madam Bones looked at her fellow officers of the court. She noted that the Minister and his Undersecretary were both as white as the ghosts of Hogwarts and she does not envy their position at all.

Anton Rosseu had made them chose between declaring Your-Know-Who is alive or admitting that they tried to frame the Boy-Who-Lived. Looking at the media, some of whom came from outside the country, and at least one who is reporting live, she sighed again.

"Honorable Members of the Wizengamot" Madam Bones said, "I think that we have heard enough" wisely, no one decided to disagree, "I would now call for a vote, those who believe that Harry James Potter is guilty?" a few hands, including that of Minister Fudge, his undersecretary and Percy Weasley, shot up, "and those who say that he is not guilty?" this time, almost everyone's hand shot up.

"Excellent" Madam Bones said, she turned towards Harry, she smiled at him before saying, "Harry James Potter, you are declared not guilty of the charges against you brought before this court, you are free to go." She sighed and quickly added, "On a more personal note, I would like to apologize for my failure to investigate this case more thoroughly" she glared at Fudge, leaving little to the imagination as to who prevented her from a much more through investigation, "rest assured that I would investigate why two Dementors are in Surrey at that time, and I wish you luck in your coming actions and your OWL's later this school year"

"Thank you, Madam Bones" Harry replied.

Madam Bones nodded, "This case is dismissed and the defendant is free to go, court is adjourned"

TEN

Ministry of Magic Atrium

London, England

Harry nodded and politely inclined his head towards the Director of the Magical Law Enforcement, and at the same time, he watched, from the corner of his eye, as Minister Fudge left the room with the small party of Wizengamot members who have followed his lead in the vote.

Harry does not know if they are trying to avoid being seen in the place where they were defeated one moment longer than necessary, or if they are trying to get their faces away from the cameras, as Al had claimed they would do after the hearing. If it was the latter, then it was a failure, because they left together, while those that voted for Harry remained in the chambers. By observing those who are left, one can easily deduce who those who are gone are.

Those that were fortunate enough to watch the spectacle are also beginning to file out of the chambers, including the local reporters, whom Harry suspected would be making their way to the private offices of Fudge.

On the corner of his eye, Harry saw Professor Dumbledore approach him and Al. The headmaster of Hogwarts was joined a few moments later by the Weasley's who are among the audience, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Ron, Ginny, and the twins. Harry noted that Ginny was carrying a flask and the boy-who-lived already knows what that flask contains.

Unnoticed by the approaching Weasley-Dumbledore party, Harry noted Hec and his partner, Andrew, took position, flanking the only exit available to the members of the public. Harry noted that both Hec and William are carrying identical suitcases as the one that Al was carrying, so he was sure that both men are also armed.

Meanwhile, Hermione and her bodyguards also made their way to regroup with Harry. Unlike the Weasley-Dumbledore party, they had chosen to use the staircase that would bring them to the side of Harry instead of the staircase that would lead to the only exit.

Due to this fact, Hermione and her bodyguards reached Harry first. The first thing that Hermione did was to throw herself at Harry. Harry caught her in his arms and they shared an embrace.

Al, who stood beside Harry and also had his attention towards the approaching probable-hostiles, noted the look of jealousy that was written in the face of both Ginny and Ron. While the battle-wizard cannot be sure for certain why the two children are showing jealousy over something that Hermione and Harry had once done, in front of the Great Hall, no less, he suspected that it had something to do with their, Ginny and Ron's, plans for the young couple that he, Al, now serves.

At the same time, Al noted the glee on the faces of the Weasley twins. Al was already aware that the twins are never going to betray Harry. Their loyalty to the Potter Heir, Al knows, is second only to Hermione among those who are at Hogwarts.

Mrs. Weasley was almost the same color as Dumbledore when Hermione and Harry shared the embrace, in fact, Al noted, the headmaster and the Weasley matriarch looked more like a couple than Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, which prompted Al to look at Mr. Weasley.

Part of the reason that he looked at Arthur Weasley was the fact that he cannot believe that someone like him could be party to the treachery that is being planned by his family members. Al had believed the statements of Sirius and Remus that Arthur Weasley is a harmless man who would never harm a fly. Harry and Hermione assured Al of the same thing when they talked about their potential adversaries.

When Al saw Mr. Weasley, he almost whipped his suitcase and mowed down the probable-hostiles on approach. The first thing that Al noted was the glassy-eyes of his subject, and the second was the tell-tale smell of a powerful love potion present on his breath. It was obvious that the man was under the control of the imperius curse, and is also suffering from being potioned up. Unfortunately, Al cannot tell what the potion is without getting a sample of it.

Ginny watched the actions of Hermione and Harry with cold anger in her eyes. To her, the only one who could embrace Harry like that is her.

Ron, on the other hand, was thinking a bit more. The youngest Weasley male never saw Hermione in the same way that Ginny saw, or rather, imagined, Harry. If he can help it, he would rather use the love potion on someone else, but his mother had insisted on netting Hermione first. He was jealous of the embrace not because he likes Hermione, but because Hermione and Harry are showing too much affection, and that, in turn, would damage the chances of his family getting the Potter gold.

"Hey mate" Ron said. He and his companions stopped within touching distance of Harry and Hermione. Both Harry and Hermione ignored them while Al pretended to tie his shoes.

"Harry?" Ginny asked. Harry and Hermione broke their embrace, but they did not let go of each others hands.

"Let's go get some fresh air" Harry suggested to Hermione. He, however, and as planned, did it in such a way that while he only suggested it to Hermione, everyone accepted the invitation.

Al nodded he led the way back to the lifts, but only for Harry and Hermione. Francesca and Marcus brought up the rear, where the Weasley's found themselves in, while Hec and Andrew took the front, though no one among those that are not aware of their identities know that.

Dumbledore fell in beside Harry and had pestered the young man, to no avail, till they reach the atrium where reports were waiting for them.

Dumbledore decided to do something about that, not because he had Harry's best interest at heart, but rather, because he was afraid that someone might ask a question that would embarrass the headmaster of Hogwarts, "Ladies and gentlemen" the headmaster said, "Harry is not going to be answering questions today"

"On the contrary, headmaster" Harry said, he looked coldly at his headmaster and smirked, "Harry would be answering some questions today"

Dumbledore was surprised that Harry rebuffed him, but he quickly recovered, "Harry" he said in his best grandfatherly voice that

always worked on Harry, "I do not think that that would be for the best"

Harry nodded, which made the headmaster think that he had managed to convince Harry, but then Harry said, "Headmaster, what I do outside Hogwarts is not up to you, and even if you think that it is not the best for me, why should I listen?" it was a rhetorical question, because Harry continued, "You thought that it was best for me to go to the Dursley's where I was abused for ten years, so forgive me if I do not share your opinion that that what you do is best for me"

Al smiled as he watched the reporters take down their notes. So far, everything was going according to plan.

"Harry" Dumbledore said, he maintained his façade even if deep inside, he wants to shout at the boy, "I only have your best interest at heart"

"Right old man" Harry said, "So tell me, headmaster, was having a broom closet under the stairs for ten years as my room the best for me?"

A collective gasp was heard among the assembled reporters. Al had no doubt that they would now consider the incompetence of the Ministry as nothing more but the appetizer.

Ginny decided to move on her own, she stepped forward and offered Harry the flask that she was holding. In her best caring voice, Ginny handed Harry the flask and asked, "Harry, would you like a drink?" For some reason, she ignored Hermione, who was still holding hands with Harry as she offered her flask to him.

Harry nodded, though he did not smile when he took the flask from Ginny, he did noticed the smile on the face of the girl. However, instead of drinking from the flask, Harry handed the flask to Dumbledore and said, "Headmaster, I think that the heat is making you sweat, here, I would be kind enough to share this with you"

Dumbledore smiled at Harry and refused the offer, "Young Ginevra gave you the flask Harry, it is yours" he replied.

"I insist" Harry replied, but when it was clear that Dumbledore would not be persuaded, Harry just nodded. He looked at Hermione, they

are still holding hands, much to the irritation of Ginny and Ron, and then back at the headmaster, and said, "If my headmaster would not share a drink with me, then perhaps, one of our reporters can" he offered the drink to a random reporter, only to be stopped by Ginny.

"Harry, I made that drink for you" she said.

Harry appeared confused, "Made it for me?" he asked, and when Ginny nodded, Harry asked, "What's in it?" Harry, and the reporters, watched as Ginny's face became redder than her hair. Without knowing, she made the reports suspicious about what really is in the flask.

"Mr. Potter, do you think that its love potion?" someone asked. Dumbledore looked at the assembled crowd of reports to identify which among them shouted that. The headmaster intended to remind the reporter of what he is suggesting, but failed to find the reporter. He cannot afford to have that question answered since it might result to someone demanding that the flask be tested. Dumbledore knew that the love potion meant for Harry was in that flask.

Al smiled at the obvious discomfort of the headmaster and the obvious attempt of the headmaster to find whoever it was that shouted that. Unfortunately for the headmaster, he would not be able to find the person who shouted that, unless of course, the headmaster knows what a tape recorder is.

Al decided to jump into the fray at that moment and open their second offensive for this morning, "Ladies and gentlemen" Al said, "Need I remind you that love potions are not allowed in any country? Besides, I do not think that it would work on my client anyway"

"But Al, we need to know if there really is a love potion in that flask?" a reporter asked, "A simple detection charm should be more than enough"

Al looked at Harry, who nodded, "I think that I should be the one to handle this" he said, Harry handed him the flask, while Al retrieved his wand. As Al had expected, Ginny attempted to retrieve the flask. Al took the opportunity to do some further testing on his suspicions. He allowed Ginny to crash into him and at the same time, he made a show of casting the spell, but because the younger Weasley

crashed into him, the spell, instead of hitting the flask, hit Mr. Weasley instead.

Mr. Weasley glowed pink when the spell hit him, making him positive for love potions. Reporters immediately began snapping pictures when they did so.

"What the hell was that for girl?" Al asked. He looked at Ginny and saw that she had managed to knock out the flask and break it, spilling the contents on the stone floor of the atrium. That made the liquid impervious to love potion detection spells.

"Why is Mr. Weasley glowing Al?" Harry asked, he did not even need to act surprised, because he is surprised. To the best of his knowledge, Al did not talk about this when he, Al, discussed the plan. A quick glance towards Hermione, who shook her head in the negative, confirmed that Al did not talk about this at all.

"Harry, Mr. Weasley is showing positive for love potions" Al explained, and then he shook his head, "Although for the love of me, I do not know why"

The damage done, Dumbledore could do nothing to protect the behind of his most loyal supporter. So instead of attempting to cover this up, which, the old man knows is doomed since the number of reporters in the atrium who have witnessed it are in the hundreds, he suggested, "Perhaps, we should take Arthur to St. Mungo's to determine how this happened"

Harry and Hermione wanted to protest, but a quick glance at Al, who told them without words to let it go, stopped their protest even before they can say anything.

"Perhaps, Ms. Granger and yourself can accompany us?" Dumbledore asked in a pleasant voice, "After all, are you not concerned about Arthur's condition?"

"We would drop by soon enough" Harry replied. He did not even look at the headmaster when he said that, and then he quickly added, "At this point, I think that the healers would still take some time to diagnose him, so we would just waste our time there"

"I agree with Harry, headmaster" Hermione replied before Dumbledore can say anything, "Besides, Mr. Weasley already has his family with him, I think Harry needs me here"

Harry turned towards Hermione and smiled at her, "I would always need you" he replied in a sweet voice. They held themselves, however, and did not kiss. It, however, did not matter, since their lips are about only five inches away from each other. To the media, that was as good as a kiss.

Al smiled at the quick reaction of Harry and Hermione. Although this was not part of the plan since Al did not expect someone else to be actually dosed up, his two charges easily took control of the situation and turned it to their advantage. Harry and Hermione might not announce their current relationship, but the battle wizard has no doubt that the writers in gossip magazines would be gossiping about them.

Harry and Hermione noted the reaction of various people to their closeness. The two youngest Weasley's were green with jealousy, while their mother was red with anger. The Weasley twins are obviously pleased with this new development, but at the same time, they are worried about their father. Dumbledore looked as if someone kicked his favorite cat.

"Headmaster" Al said after a few moments, "I think that you should worry more about Mr. Weasley right now" he motioned to Mr. Weasley, who looked weak and about to collapse before adding, "whatever it was that he consumed, it reacted badly to the detection spell"

Dumbledore nodded, "Yes" he replied, he glared at Molly who was still red-faced with anger, before he turned back towards Harry and said, "Harry, as soon as you are able, please contact me, there are some things that we need to discuss."

Harry merely nodded. Dumbledore took that to mean that Harry would contact him, but in truth, the boy-who-lived has no plans of contacting the old man. A few moments later, Dumbledore and the Weasley's disappeared from the floor, presumably, on their way to St. Mungo's, though Al would not let it past Molly Weasley and Dumbledore to head straight home and attempt to diagnose the problem themselves.

"I apologize for that" Al said as soon as the unfortunates were out of the way, he sighed for show and then looked at the reporters in front of him, "I think it would be better if we do this as calmly and as orderly as possible, and Harry does not have a lot of time, so we can only entertain" he looked at Harry who mouthed a figure, and then back at the assembled media, "five questions"

Most of the reporters among the assembled know that Anton Rosseu only allow five questions when he is interviewed, so it was not a surprise when that figure came.

"Mr. Potter, Chicago Tribunal" the reporter introduced himself before asking his question, "What do you think about the charges leveled, and dismissed, against you?"

"Obviously, the ministry is out of control" Harry replied, he kept himself strictly in the script as he added, "They complain that I am an attention-seeking brat, and yet, they leveled these charges against me, did they not imagine, at least, that doing so would mean that the attention would again be on me?" it was a rhetorical question, "In any case, I do not need any more attention that I am getting right now, I have a madman who is after me because I killed him when I was a baby, which also made me famous, and I won the Tri-Wizard tournament, which again made me famous" he smiled, "Right now, the only attention I want to have on me is the attention of my loving girlfriend" at that, Hermione stepped beside Harry and smiled at the crowd as the two of them again held hands.

"Anton has said that you would be filing cases against your non-magical guardians and against Professor Dumbledore. May we know how you are treated there?" the reporter asked, and then he added, "I am from Wizard Times Magazine"

"Please forgive me for not answering that question sir" Harry replied, "I do not wish to speak about my past life with the family of my mother's sister, so please" the reporter nodded, "However, you can be rest assured that Al would be filing these cases"

"We are also filing a case against the British magical government as to the incarceration of an apparently innocent man" Al said, he took all the attention towards him, "Sirius Black"

"But Anton, Black reportedly killed thirteen people" a reporter complained, "How can you claim that he is apparently innocent"

Al smiled, "Innocent until proven guilty, Matt" he replied, "Sirius Black has never been charged with murder, never been charged with theft, hell, the guy probably has never even been charged with underage magic, but even if that is the case, they threw him in a jail cell for thirteen years" he smiled and added, "the man cannot even be charged with escaping from prison, because, British Magical Law has no law that states that you are a criminal if you managed to break out of Azkaban"

"What was that?" someone asked before he can stop himself.

"That is the fourth question, ladies and gentlemen" Al replied, "Only one more question after I answer this one." He paused to allow what he had just said to sink in, and then added, "It's true, there is no law that states that escaping from Azkaban is a crime, probably because no one has done it before, so...." Al trailed off.

No one wanted to ask the last question, mostly because no one is sure if his or her question would be the right one. Finally, after a few moments, one man did ask a question, "Would Mr. Potter be returning to Hogwarts in line with the charges that he is filing against the headmaster of that school?"

Al looked at Harry, and then motioned for him to answer the question. It was, after all, not a decision that is based on Al, but rather, based on Harry. Harry looked at Hermione, who shrugged, mentally telling her that she does not care whether or not they are returning, and then back at the assembled reporters, "Unfortunately, we, that is to say, me and Hermione, my girlfriend, are yet to take our OWL's, so we have to attend school, though we are both not sure if it would be at Hogwarts, or if it would be somewhere else"

"No more questions" Al said, ending the press conference.

Potter Island

BIOT

It was evening on the island when Harry, Hermione and their escorts returned to the island. Dan, Emma, Sirius and Remus were waiting for them when they materialized in the living room of the manor house in the island, and none of them could mistake the grin of triumph in the faces of the new arrivals.

"I take it that everything went according to plan then?" Dan asked.

Al nodded and smiled, "Even better" he replied, he and his fellow bodyguards, all of whom were carrying steel suitcases, placed their suitcases on the surface in front of them and then opened it, "Idiots cannot even tell that we were carrying small arms in the center of their government" he smiled, "The guard thought that it was some sort of water container"

Al watched as Dan's mouth opened, "You brought an MP-5 in a hearing?" and when Al nodded, Dan added, "Not only that, the guards saw the weapon, but did not say anything about it"

"I told you that they are idiots" Al replied, he looked at Hec, Francesca, Marcus and Andrew, before saying, "We'll do the debrief tomorrow, for today, why don't you guys get some rest?" he asked, though it was clear to the four that it was not a question, it was an order, and the four of them nodded before they filed out of the house.

Harry and Hermione thanked each one of their companions as they filed out of the house and then they looked at Al. Both are wearing an expression on their face that clearly stated that they want answers now. Al smiled at them both and nodded, "Why don't we meet at the dining room in ten minutes?" he suggested.

ELEVEN

Potter Island

BIOT

Ten minutes later saw Harry, Hermione, Dan, Emma, Remus, Sirius and Al in the dinning room, each, occupying their seat on the large oblong-shaped table that can easily sit fifteen people. As was usual, Harry was occupying the head of the table chair, while Hermione was seated to his right hand side.

Al was seated on the left hand side of Harry, as well as Dan and Emma. Remus and Sirius occupied seats located beside the seat of Hermione.

There were two bottles of wine in the table, one of them already empty, while the other one was half-full. Almost every adult in the table have at least one half-full glass of wine occupying the surface in front of them.

"Al" Harry said, he looked at the battle wizard and nodded once, a silent indication that the battle wizard may begin his story.

Al nodded once, "Where should I begin?" he asked rhetorically, and then he smiled, before he looked at Harry and continued, "I seem to remember you asking me why Arthur Weasley glowed pink when my spell hit him?" Harry nodded, though he was not sure where Al was going with this line of explanation, "The spell that hit Arthur Weasley was designed to detect the effects of love potion," he elaborated, "I am, of course, not sure what potion was used, other than the fact that it is a love potion"

"What has this got to do with why you have never come to Harry's aid before Al?" Hermione asked. She looked ready to argue, and in fact, she was about to say something else, but she felt the hand of her husband holding hers, silently asking her to let Al explain himself. She nodded to Harry once and then promptly closed her mouth.

Al looked at Hermione, "You need to understand why I never came to his aid before" he said, before sighing, "As you may have remembered, I told you that it had something to do with my experiences in the Far East?" Hermione nodded, "Good, yet, you

know that I was born in Britain, I served with your father" he inclined his head towards Dan as he said that, "yet why am I in the Far East?"

"I was born in 1965" Al said, he smiled at Dan, and as he had expected, the older man was surprised by the revelation, in fact, the dentist looked as if he was about to complain, but before he, Dan, can open his mouth, Al cut him off, "I was sixteen years old when I enlisted with the Royal Navy, seventeen when I joined the SBS, and seventeen when we went to war"

"You looked older" Dan commented under his breath.

"I am a wizard" Al replied by way of an answer, he smiled and added, "I entered Hogwarts in 1976, I was eleven, of course, sorted into Gryffindor, but only spent five years there" he smiled at Harry, "My adventures in Hogwarts were nothing compared to yours, though I was in the Quidditch team, I was a Chaser, not a Seeker" he smiled before he added, "Defense was my favorite subject, though I was also excellent with charms and transfigurations, and like you, I hate potions, though mostly that was because Slughorn was more interested in making connections rather than teaching students"

"But I thought...." Hermione began.

Al nodded, he did not need to hear what she was about to say to know what she wanted to say, "The York family is known in the magical world, yes, but we do not flaunt our name," he smiled, "I did not allow Slughorn to get his paws on me, told him that I was more interested in learning than socializing, that shut up the old coot, that did" he smiled and drained his wine glass, before he added, "I never finished Hogwarts"

"You never?" Hermione asked.

Al shook his head, "Left shortly after my OWL's." Al said, as he inclined his head towards Dan, "I did not think that the curriculum that Hogwarts offers was any good, you see, I was sure that I could learn much more useful spells here, at the island"

Al looked at Harry and said, "You see, I was already aware of my responsibilities, and my duties as a member of my family, the only reason that I went to Hogwarts was because my father thought that I

should observe Lord James, not that he needed observing" he sighed, "My father and I never agreed on many things, I wanted to be a lawyer, hence, Anton Rosseu, he wanted me to be an Auror"

"We had a fight" Al continued, "During my fifth year, not about my OWL grades, of that I can assure you" he added to Hermione, "It was during this time when my desire to become a lawyer hit me hard, and my old man was adamant on the Auror path, he felt that my grades show more than Auror material, see, I was able to achieve an Exceeds for my worst subject, potions, and my defense was outstanding."

Harry nodded. He himself wanted to become an Auror, and for a few moments, he wondered why Al would not wish that for himself, but as he listened to the conversation, he acknowledged that just because it was what he wanted for himself does not mean that it is also what Al wanted for himself.

"I ran away" Al continued, "Took what little money I have, my wand, and the clothes that I have on my back, and I ran away" he smiled, "Extremely juvenile of me to do so, but it is something that I cannot change anymore" he added quietly, "It killed my father."

"Well, seeing that I ran away from home, I guess that I cannot fault you with that" Sirius said, he interrupted the narration and added, "I am sure that James would have understood"

"Ah, you see Sirius" Al said, "This was 1980" he said, "Harry had just been born and I had just sworn my loyalty to him, Lord James had asked me to look after him, and I still bloody ran away" he smiled and looked at Harry, "This is one of the reasons why I have not come to your aid before, Harry, because I am afraid that you would reject my help if you were to know this story, and I hope that once you have heard the complete story, you would accept me"

"Then let me hear the entire story before I judge you Al" Harry said, he looked at Al before adding, "Where were you on the night of my parents murder?"

"Wandering the muggle world" Al replied, "I don't think I would have done anything though, if that is any consolation, I was powerless, and I did not know what happened to your parents until after I rejoined the magical world, some four years later, in 1985."

He looked at Harry and said, "By that time, you were gone, Fidelius charm or whatever it was, I could not find you. Sirius" he inclined his head towards Sirius, "was in Azkaban, at that time, I still believed that he killed Wormtail and betrayed your parents, while Remus" he inclines his head towards Remus, "was in the Middle-East, making odds and ends meet just to survive" he smiled ironically, "I thought to ask Dumbledore, but for some reason, I never did, perhaps because I fell into the same conclusion that Voldemort is now gone forever and" he paused before adding, "during this time, we still thought that he was our friend, and that if he is keeping you from us, he is doing so for your own protection" at the look on Harry's face that suggested that the young man was about to protest, Al quickly added, "You were five years old during this time, Harry"

"Did not change the fact that his relatives are abusing him" Hermione protested. She was about to launch a tirade when she again felt the touch of her husband on her arm. She looked at him in protest, but Harry slowly shook his head.

Al nodded, "I cannot forgive myself for that" he admitted, sighing before he added, "I never did know where you were sent until after I made contact with Remus."

"Were you ever planning on divulging all of these secrets to Harry?" Hermione asked, "In particular, his legacy?"

Al nodded, "That was actually what made us think that Lemon-Drop was not on our side" he explained, "You see, during this time, Harry cannot invoke his rights, he had to wait until he was eleven, and because he is descended from a founder, we thought that Lemon-Drop would divulge it to him when he turned eleven, we were wrong, of course.

"In hindsight, it would have been obvious that the Old Man would send Harry to his relatives" Al continued after no one commented on his last words, "The problem was, we were not sure, and even if we were, we had no way of knowing where those relatives were, Lemon-Drop had erected some sort of ward, or barrier, or whatever, that made it impossible, even for the intelligent section of our people, to find where Harry was, and, to tell you the truth, I was out as well"

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"1982" Dan said, he looked at his daughter and explained, "He was fighting a war with me" he sighed "We were at the Falklands"

Al nodded, "A lot of horror that war was" he said, he looked at Harry and Hermione and said, "that war has nothing magical in it, it was muggle war through and through, but that did not make it tame compared to a magical war, if anything, it was more brutal" he sighed, "The first magical bonding I've ever witnessed was before we shipped out to fight, a buddy of mine kissed his sweetheart goodbye before we left. They were muggles, of course, but love is a magic that everyone shares" he smiled sadly, and everyone in the table saw that the only reason that he was smiling was because he does not want to cry, "He was killed in action three days into the conflict, I was the one who visited her after the war, returned his personal effects to her. She never married"

"Fighting in that war made me determined to find you" Al said to Harry, "but as I had said, I could not find you. I left the navy shortly after the war and finished my NEWT's, and then I formulated a plan"

"Understand, Harry, Hermione" Al said, adding Hermione because he was sure that she would take offense if he did not, "that I did not know what your life, Harry, was like, and while I understand that that is not an excuse, I would still like to ask for your forgiveness for my failure to come to your aid before"

Harry and Hermione both nodded.

"My plan then" Al said, "As I had said, I thought that Lemon-Drop was on our side, and I believed that he would have told Harry all about Lord Potter and his legacy by the time he was eleven years old. I did not think that he would have consented to Harry's emancipation by this time, but that was fine with us, since we did not think that Harry would be ready, but we believed that he would have at least told Harry all about it so that we can begin training Harry to take up the mantle."

"Which, obviously, did not happen" Harry said, he looked at Al and asked, "Did that convince you that Dumbledore is not on our side?"

Al shook his head, "In all honesty, no" he replied, "I acknowledged that he has a lot of things to do, and that perhaps, it might have

slipped his mind, but when we heard about the fiasco that was the Chamber, and how you were accused of being Heir of Slytherin, we got suspicious, we know that Lemon-Drop is aware of your real heritage, there was no way that he is not, and yet, he did not do shit to dispel these damaging rumors, so we investigated, and what we found, was so damaging to my image of Lemon-Drop, it convinced us that he is our adversary" he looked at Harry, "We found that he was stealing from you"

"We would have launched a rescue operation there and then, attack Hogwarts and take down anyone who dares to stop us" Al said, "but Hec managed to placate us by telling us that we need more evidence, so we dug more, and found that the Weasley's are also dipping their hands in your pockets"

"In your Third Year, with Sirius having escaped, remember, we still thought that he was the traitor, we had to work double time, find him so that we can keep you safe," Al said, "Unfortunately, the ministry managed to place Dementors on the grounds even before we can move in, we may have guns, but guns are useless when it comes to them, so I admittedly decided to focus on Sirius. We found him three days after you and Hermione helped him escape. Damn near shot him down as well when he flew too close to Potter manor"

"Nearly had myself shot as well when I landed as well, pup" Sirius said, "Good thing Al was there. His boys have real itchy trigger fingers"

"He was able to convince me, Pensieve and Veritaserum had played a large role in it, so we welcomed him back" Al said, "Remus joined us as soon as he was able and between the three of us, we began to plan to get you back"

"But you still do not have a location" Hermione said.

"Right" Al replied, "Its not that we do not know the address, it was that we do not know how the hell to get there" Al explained, "We know that Harry stays at 4 Privet Drive, so we can place spectators there. But even though we can see the house, we cannot see Harry. Also, there is the fact that Lemon-Drop has his own people watching the place. We cannot afford to let him discover who we are until the last possible moment"

"Which is today?" Harry asked.

"Which is today," Al confirmed with a happy smile and a nod of his head, "Anyway, Voldemort got back at the end of your fourth year, so Lemon-Drop reactivated his public face, the Order, with Sirius and Remus as members. Thankfully, Lemon-Drop still does not know about us, which means Remus and Sirius are above suspicion, and so, Remus was assigned to guard Harry"

"And what is the use of guarding someone if you cannot see him?" Hermione asked, connecting the dots, "Remus can now see Harry, and he can share this information with you."

Al nodded, "Unfortunately, Remus' first time on guarding Harry was when he was attacked by the Dementors, when we managed to assist him."

"Well, at least, you were able to help me and take me out of there." Harry replied, nodding once at Hermione, who reluctantly nodded. "I trust you with my life, Al, Hermione and I trust you with it."

"Thank you Harry" Al replied, he paused for a few moments, before he added, "I think, however, that there is something else that you should know about me before you give me your complete trust."

Harry raised his eyebrows, and Al replied, "I am a murderer, Harry, I've killed people, as I told you, I've fought in a war, and in the east, I was a dark creature hunter"

"Killing dark creatures is not murder Al" Harry replied.

Al smiled ironically, "You see, that's where Hogwarts had been behind," he replied, inclining his head towards Remus, "I know that Remus never taught you on killing them, just understanding them," Harry and Hermione both nodded, "I..." Al hesitated, "Harry, Hermione, would you consider Remus as a dark creature?" Both teens shook their heads, "Yet, he is considered a dark creature in Britain," he smiled, "What you must understand is that not all those that are considered dark creatures are dark creatures" he retrieved his wand and laid it on the table.

"Perhaps it would be easier to explain it like this" Al said, he looked at Hermione, "What do you know about nine-tailed foxes?"

"They are found almost exclusively in the east" Hermione replied, "I do not know much about them because of that, but I've read about them, they are said to be powerful and vengeful, that to see one means to be cursed."

"They are considered dark because of that," Al replied, "Are Thestrals dark creatures?"

Hermione did not hesitate, "Yes, they are, only those who have seen people die can see them," she replied.

"Yet, they are helpful. Those carriages at Hogwarts? They are pulled by Thestrals," Al said, "It is only their nature, and just as Thestrals can't change their nature, neither can nine-tailed foxes."

"So because of that you think that you are a murderer?" Harry asked.

"It's more than that. Not only am I a murderer, I am also a failure." he sighed, "My wand core has a hair from a nine-tailed fox as its core, which begs the question, where did that come from?"

Harry and Hermione looked at Al, and he replied, "When I was in the East, I met a girl. Her name was Veronica which meant victory. She was also magical like me, and I thought that she came from the west since she looked more like a westerner than an easterner. Anyway, she was my partner for the next five years, from 1985 to 1990. She did not accompany me in my hunts, of course, I would have none of that, but she kept house and cooked for me, took care of me when I was sick, and basically, acted like my wife" he smiled fondly as he remembered her, "I was, and I think she was as well, falling in love, but she refused to kiss me. Which, I am sure that you now know, would have sealed a bond, if there was one."

"What happened?" Hermione asked quietly.

With a smile that can only be considered ironic, Al said, "One of her hairs is the core of my wand"

Hermione's eyes widened, "She was...?" she began, Al nodded, and she amended what she wanted to say, "But that would make you cursed, Al. That would..." she looked at Al.

"As I said, it is their nature. I think that you are right when you say that I am cursed," he said, "I do not think that I would find someone else who can be like Nica was to me"

"You were the one who killed her weren't you?" Harry asked, as he connected the dots as well.

Al nodded, "I was not aware of it myself until after the fox that I shot transformed into her right before my eyes." he smiled sadly, smiling that same smile that everyone now knew he put on so that he would never have to cry, "I would have shot myself there and then, but she stopped me and gave me one of her hairs. Told me to take it and make a wand with it, and that she would always be with me." He looked at the wand that must have been the one that Al constructed with the hair, "I was twenty five when that happened."

He looked at Harry and Hermione, "So you see why I am a murderer as well as a failure," Al said, "I killed the woman that I love and more, I failed to uphold my promise to protect her from anyone or anything,"

"Yet, you tried your best" surprisingly, it was Emma who said that. She had kept silent during the narration, but she was now back in full force, "There are things that we cannot prevent happening, and in this case, it was something that you couldn't prevent." She paused to allow Al to accept those few words, before she added, "Your Nica, she accepted that and I think that in the end, she was happy for you,"

"Your wand would not have worked with her hair if she was not," Hermione said, and then her eyes widened, "You didn't think that you would do a better job with protecting Harry didn't you? If you came back, that is."

"Yes" he admitted, looking at Hermione, "My happiness is nothing compared to the duty that my family has always upheld, and I feared that I would fail not only myself, but also my entire family, should I fail Harry."

"Then don't fail," Harry replied, "You are a good man, Al, and I would like you to continue with your job,"

Voldemort Lair

Location Unknown

"Potter and his lawyer had left Fudge a choice, my lord," Lucius Malfoy said, "Fudge must now chose between apologizing to Potter for the attack or acknowledging that you have returned."

Voldemort nodded curtly. He thought about which option would give him the most advantage, but it did not take long before the dark lord decided that he cannot have the magical world acknowledging that he is back, he turned towards his spy within the ministry and said, "Have Fudge apologize for the attack"

"It would not be that simple, my lord" Lucius replied, he added, "Fudge has been embarrassed in front of the whole world, it would not be easy to have him apologize, more than likely, he would be forced to resign"

"We cannot have the world know of my return yet!" Voldemort snapped, "Have Fudge apologize" he paused for a few moments and then asked, "What options do we have when it comes to attacking Potter?"

"Potter has disappeared, my lord, and the Weasleys are protected" Lucius replied, "If we are to attack, then I would suggest the mudblood. She has no way of protecting her house or family so it should be easy. "

"Yes" Voldemort replied, "Plan an attack against the mudblood then. You are in charge, and make sure that you bring her to me alive, Lucius. We will use her as our hostage and drag Potter here."

"What about the prophecy, my Lord?" Lucius asked.

"It is of no consequence" Voldemort replied airily, "We could take it now, but it would be easier if Potter is already in our custody"

"Yes, my Lord" Lucius replied, he bowed and then added, "With your permission, my lord, I beg your leave to withdraw so that I may plan the attack,"

Voldemort nodded and waved his servant off with a bored expression, gears shifting in his mind.

TWELVE

Potter Island

BIOT

The two weeks after Harry's trial were pretty much the same as the week before the trial.

Al, Sirius, Remus, and a whole cadre of teachers had proceeded to make the life of both Harry and Hermione a living hell. They woke up at around five in the morning, made to jog for two hours, ate at half past seven, and then they continued their training.

The first few days of intensive training, both Harry and Hermione went to bed dead tired. They just hit the bed and before even five minutes had passed, they would already be asleep. But after they got used to it, they started to cuddle in bed when their instructors left them alone.

They learned, however, not to take it too far since Al had an irritating habit of waking them up. Not everyday, of course, he said that he trusted the two of them to wake up on time on their own. He said that because he trusts them to do so, he informed them that they would add a kilometer in their marching routine for every minute that they are late.

It, however, did not stop him from entering their room and waking them up, and he does it in random intervals, so there is no way that Harry and Hermione can predict when he would next disturb their sleep.

Harry had also decided that Al was doing it as some sort of favor for Dan, because he and Hermione cannot consummate their marriage knowing that there is a chance that Al might catch them in the morning.

In the two weeks since after the trial, both Harry and Hermione had become proficient in just about anything that Al, Sirius, and Remus had decided to teach them. All three of their teachers had expressed confidence that they could, at least achieve 'Acceptable' in their NEWT's, though they are expecting at least 'Exceeds Expectations' in their OWL's. Al had said that he was expecting 'Outstanding',

though given the quality of defense education that he had given, both Harry and Hermione agreed, at least privately, that anything less would be almost impossible.

With only six days left before start of term, both Harry and Hermione were wondering when, and if they, would receive their letters. Both have postulated that the headmaster would send them the two Prefect badge, as well as the Quidditch Captain badge for Harry to get the two of them back under his control. It was something that Al, Sirius, and Remus agreed on.

The letters finally arrived on their final summer weekend, though they were not delivered by owls, as Harry and Hermione had expected. As they thought about it, they both supposed that that is to be expected, since they are too far away from Britain.

Instead, their letter was hand-delivered to them by Hec, who decided to visit the manor house at breakfast. Apparently, Dan was not the only one who thinks that Al's choice for breakfast is odd, either that, or he really just had too many things to do so he had to beg off having breakfast with the man who is technically his superior.

As Hec waved his goodbye to them as he walked out, he handed a slip of paper to Al, who took it without comment.

Harry opened his letter first. He noted that the letter was not sealed, and there are a few creases in it, an indication that the letter has been opened before, so he looked at Hermione, who had also just opened her unsealed and creased letter, before the two of them looked at Al.

Al, who had finished reading the contents of the paper that Hec had given him, looked at both Harry and Hermione before he said, "Standard security procedure, and it was not even us who did it" he smiled, and handed the paper to Dan, who took it without comment, "Lemon-Drop gave Hermione the prefect badge for his year, but not for Harry, apparently, Lemon-Drop chose Ronald Weasley, and as for Captain, Lemon-Drop chose Harry"

"Where are the badges?" Hermione asked before she can stop herself.

It wasn't Al who replied. It was Dan who replied, surprising both Harry and Hermione, "You are not going to accept the badge young lady" Dan said in a fierce voice, and then he looked at Harry and added, "And neither are you"

"Perfectly understandable reaction, Dan" Al said before anyone can say anything, he looked at Harry and Hermione and said, "Both badges have been turned into portkeys that would take you to Lemon-Drop's office at Hogwarts, so the goblins, those letters were routed through Gringotts, used both of them"

Sirius and Remus grinned as Al continued, "They sent two nifflers to Lemon-Drop's office" he smiled before he added, "Niffler heaven"

Harry nodded, remembering the creatures that Al had mentioned and the office of the headmaster. He had no doubt that the Nifflers would find the place nirvana because of the shiny items there.

"Why can I not accept the badge?" Hermione asked, "I mean, the badge was destroyed, but why can I not take the position?"

"Because Ronald Weasley is the other prefect, that's why." Dan replied, again surprising both Harry and Hermione.

Al nodded, "Your bond with Harry would negate the effect of any potions used against you, but it doesn't mean that the red headed bastard cannot take advantage of you." he lost his smile as he added, "Of course, he would not survive that, given what I have been teaching the two of you. But your parents would rather not have that scenario in their hands, and I agree"

Hermione nodded, "I will write to Professor McGonagall and tell her that I don't want the position" she replied, catching Harry's eye, just in time to see him agree with her decision. She had no doubt that he would not accept the position of team captain as well.

"There are only two new books" Harry said after he finished reading his list, "The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 5 by Miranda Goshawk and Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Slinkhard"

Sirius and Remus blinked upon hearing the title of their book on defense. The two looked at one another and then at Al, before Sirius said, "That book's a joke," he complained, "What is the bloody

Defense teacher thinking, assigning a book like that to students on their OWL year and when Voldemort is out there?"

"This is an outrage, Al." Remus added, "Hogwarts is tasked with providing for good education for our children. Slinkhard is turning away from that"

Al nodded, "I know," he replied, he looked thoughtful as he added, "I've met Slinkhard before, guys. He is just like Lockhart, at least when it comes to courage. They have none." he sighed before adding, "I think this is what Fudge was playing at when he signed Educational Decree number twenty two," he paused, "Fudge wants his own spy inside Hogwarts and he appointed someone there, looks like the new defense professor is our spy"

"What do we do?" Harry asked.

Al thought about it for a few moments, and then looked at Harry, "What do you think we should do, Harry?" he asked, but before Harry could reply, he continued talking. "We have no evidence right now that whoever is appointed there is incompetent, and we cannot charge them with breaking any law since technically, they are not."

"We wait for them then?" Harry asked, sounding as though he does not like the option that is being presented to them.

Al nodded, albeit reluctantly, "We have no choice." he replied, he shook his head once again, and at the same time, another person entered the dining room and handed Al a sealed package.

Al thanked the messenger and then opened the package, revealing some sort of magazine. "Wizarding Times" Al said, answering the unasked questions of everyone in the table. He opened the magazine to a specific page, allowing those in front of him to see the cover of the magazine.

Harry and Hermione both smiled when they saw the cover, it was of Cornelius Fudge sulking and the word 'Incompetent' over him. Al took some time to read the particular news article that he was reading, though he would occasionally turn the page. Once he was done, he handed the magazine to Hermione, who read out loud:

Harry Potter charged with breaking statute of secrecy found not guilty by reason of self-defense

In a dim hall that the British Magical Government used for criminal trials, Harry James Potter, known as the Boy-Who-Lived having survived the Killing curse and banishing a Dark Lord, was tried for the simple issue of underage magic.

His Chief accuser, the Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, however, appeared more interested in putting the Boy-Who- Lived behind bars for a mere infraction rather than the truth.

Case in point, the need for a criminal trial for a simple underage magic hearing, and the fact that Minister Fudge had berated Mr. Potter as the latter was attempting to explain his side.

Mr. Potter, who was ably defended by Anton Rosseu, was easily able to prove that his life was in danger during the time in question, as he was accosted by two Dementors, creatures that the British Magical Government depend on to guard their prisons.

At one point, Mr. Rosseu was forced to ask the Head of Magical Law Enforcement in Britain if the presumption of innocent until proved guilty is no longer applicable in Britain before Minister Fudge had allowed Mr. Potter to introduce his evidence that proved beyond reasonable doubt that Mr. Potter was speaking the truth.

Faced with overwhelming evidence, the Wizengamot, which tried Mr. Potter, was forced to give a 'not guilty' verdict.

During the trial, Anton Rosseu, responding to a question by a member of the Wizengamot, accused the Ministry of staging the attack, and given that the Dementors are supposed to be under their control, we are forced to wonder if the accusations are true.

Also during the trial, Anton Rosseu had indicated that they would be filing charges against Albus Dumbledore, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, for negligence resulting to grave abuse of a minor, the minor being Mr. Potter.

Wizard Times can exclusively reveal, through investigation by our reporters, that Mr. Potter had been left by the Supreme Mugwump in an abusive non-magical home run by an obese company director

and his wife, who had a passion for hating magic. Although, we are not allowed to reveal what sort of abuse the young man had gone through, suffice to say, it was horrific. We can also exclusively reveal that it was the Supreme Mugwump himself, who had placed Mr. Potter in the said home, lending credibility to the accusations of Mr. Rosseu in regards to the case that as of press time, is yet to be filed.

In related news, Mr. Rosseu had also promised to file an action that would compel the British Magical Government to review the case of Sirius Black. He was incarcerated for thirteen years for the murder of more than a dozen muggles, but never got a trial, proving or disproving his crimes.

In the press conference that followed the trial, Mr. Potter also announced that he and his girlfriend, muggle-born Hermione Granger, who is also the top student in Hogwarts, are unsure of returning to their school for their fifth year.

The Times now question if Cornelius Fudge is the best person to lead Magical Britain. After all, the Minister had proven himself to be not only incompetent, but also prejudiced, and it would appear that his staff is just as incompetent and prejudiced as he is. We call upon the International Community to assist the British Magical Community in forming a government that is actually performing their task, instead of sending Dementors against their own heroes. .

"No word on Mr. Weasley?" Harry asked after Hermione finished reading the article.

"Next page" Al said.

Hermione nodded and turned the page. She found the article that Al had indicated and read:

Man who glowed after being hit by love-potion detection spell declared not under influence

The man who glowed pink after being hit by a love potion detection spell during the press conference after the trial of Harry Potter was declared to be not under the influence of a love potion.

Speakers from St. Mungo's, the British Magical Hospital, had announced in a statement that Arthur Weasley, Head of the Misuse

of Muggle Artifacts Office of the British Ministry of Magic, is not under influence of any love potion.

Said speakers credited this fake alert after the daughter of Mr. Weasley, Ginevra Molly Weasley, hit the caster of the spell as she retrieved her flask from him.

'The collision must have messed up the wand movement resulting to a useless detection spell' Andrew Nott, speaker of St. Mungo's, said in a statement, "Mr. Arthur Weasley has been pronounced clear of any love potion'

"Al?" Harry asked.

Al shook his head, "I cast a spell that required no wand-movement" he replied, "that damned spell was a silent casting spell for crying out loud, no wand movement necessary" he sighed before he added, "This obviously is a lie"

"You think that Mr. Weasley is under some sort of love potion influence?" Sirius asked.

"And under the Imperius curse as well, unless I missed my guess" Al replied. He sadly shook his head as he added, "And I rarely miss my guess when it comes to dark spells"

"Do we rescue him?" Remus asked, he looked at Sirius and said, "He has always been a great laugh and I reckon he is harmless"

Al shook his head, "Unfortunately, we cannot" he replied, "Arthur Weasley glowed pink when the detection spell was cast, yes, but the shade of pink indicated that he had been under the influence of the damned potion for a long time, without any clue as to what the potion was, removing him from it might mean his death"

"We can't just leave him alone" Hermione argued.

Al nodded, "We aren't" he replied, his eyes steeled as he added, "What we need is intelligence, we need to know what the potion is, and we need to know if we can counter its effects" he paused for a few moments, before he announced, "I would have a branch of intelligence work on this, but do not expect any answer tomorrow or

anytime in the near future, we need to know everything about it and detailed intelligence like this doesn't just grow overnight"

Both Harry and Hermione nodded, albeit it was clear that they did so with reluctance.

"There is something else that might interest you in the next page" Al said. Hermione turned the page again and read out loud:

Hogwarts' Falling Standards

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry had long been acknowledged as one of the best magical schools in the world.

Last year, Hogwarts, together with Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and Durmstrang Academy of Magic, participated in the Tri-Wizard tournament, which was held in the grounds of Hogwarts.

Such honor to host an international tournament is, of course, expected for a school with the reputation of Hogwarts, for throughout the years, Hogwarts had always produced the best graduates in the magical world.

Things, however, are going downhill.

Wizard Times can now reveal that the standards of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry are not only going down, they are about to hit rock bottom.

Case in point, the position of Professor in Defense Against the Dark Arts. Of the four professors that had been appointed in the past four years, yes, a new professor every year, only one had performed up to standard, and even this professor had to be fired because of the archaic laws of the British Magical World when it comes to the medical condition of Lycanthropy.

The first of these four professors, we now reveal, is a stuttering incompetent who cannot even complete a single sentence without stuttering, more, he is afraid of vampires and is misinformed that garlic has an effect on them. In short, he is a holder of defense mastery without even knowing anything about defense against the dark arts.

The second is the world famous Gilderoy Lockhart, who can actually perform only one spell without accidentally casting the wrong spell. It was ironic that he became the professor of DADA since the only spell that he can cast was the memory charm, which is a charm. He may as well have taught charms instead. Add to that, his mastery was obtained fraudulently, most likely by obliterating his examiner, and he steals the credit of other people for himself.

The third was a former auror who spent considerable time chasing down dark wizards, sacrificing much of his limb in order to make the world safe from them. He was a perfect DADA professor, but the problem was, he was actually locked up in his trunk while an imposter used Polyjuice potion to impersonate him, an imposter, who, it turned out, escaped from the British Magical prison in Azkaban.

We, in the Times, hope that the next professor who is appointed to the position is actually up to the task, but believe that this may already be a hopeless case as the Times had recently learned that Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic for Britain, had appointed his Senior Undersecretary to the post. We question the wisdom of appointing her to the post.

After all, the three professors, even the escaped convict, have obtained mastery in defense, even if only fraudulently, and they have at least passed their defense OWL's, if only barely. If things proceed as we think they should, then, when term starts in Hogwarts, there will be a professor in the staff who had to retake her OWL's in the subject that she is to teach, three times before she barely scraped an Acceptable.

"So Fudge is sending one of her lackeys to teach in Hogwarts?" Harry asked, he blinked as he remembered who the article was talking about, "that toad woman, Umbridge was it?"

"Umbridge" Al replied, he looked at Remus, who smiled, before he turned back to Harry and said, "Remus has no respect for her. She was the one who made it impossible for him to find a job, much less hold it."

"But why would Fudge do this?" Hermione asked, "And why would Dumbledore allow it?"

"The law" Al replied, "Fudge passed the law remember?" Hermione and Harry nodded, "As for Lemon-Drop," he sighed "We do not know. Though give me and these two clowns some time and we can come up with a scenario as to the why."

"Are we returning to Hogwarts, Harry?" Hermione asked.

Harry looked at his wife, and then he sighed, "I wanted to finish at the school where my parents finished their schooling, but I would run it by you, love." he smiled at her, "With a bit more training, I bet that Al, Remus and Sirius could have us scrape some Acceptable grades in our NEWT's, and what they cannot teach us, we can always learn with other tutors, but I would always run it by you first."

"If I may?" Al asked, Harry and Hermione nodded, "I think that you should return to Hogwarts. We need to know who stands with you and who stands against you, and unfortunately, you are the only ones who can make sure of that."

"It would be dangerous," Dan commented.

"But it is something that they must do." Al replied. He sighed and then added, "If Harry is going to abandon Hogwarts, then he is abandoning Britain. This would result to mass panic among the ordinary people, emboldening Voldemort." he looked at Harry and said, "I am sorry to place this upon your shoulders, Harry, but without you there, we are looking at a thousand dead. At least"

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, before Harry sighed and looked back at Al, "We are returning to Hogwarts then." he replied firmly.

"And security?" Sirius asked.

Al nodded, "I can spare four platoons. A company of men," he replied, "I'll have them move into the Forbidden Forest and set up camp there, or we can deploy them in the ships, like how those Durmstrang boys did last year. Personally, I think the ships are better as we have eight magical galleons with us, and we can easily re-supply them while they are underwater. Plus, they are closer to the castle and can provide covering artillery fire should there be a need for that,"

"Are we still taking the train?" Hermione asked.

Al nodded, "Unfortunately, yes," He looked at her and sighed, "We cannot have Lemon-Drop know that we have positioned our people so close to his school, so you have to take the train." he smiled, and before Hermione question him, Al continued, "Do not worry about your new books as well, we'll have someone pick them up."

Granger Residence,

London, England

Lucius Malfoy stood well on the sidewalk, his gaze never leaving the house in front of him. On his side, stood Fenrir Grayback, the leader of the werewolf pack, and on his other side stood another death eater who is acting as his second in command for the operation.

In front of them stood the Granger house, and between them, an assault force of eight death eaters. The orders are simple, attack the house, kill all the adults inside, and then take the Mudblood, Hermione Granger, to Malfoy Manor where Greyback had volunteered to interrogate her.

Malfoy glanced at the werewolf and his face twisted to show his disgust. He does not mind the werewolf, but what the werewolf is planning to do to the mudblood sickens him. Not so much as the interrogation, of course, but the thought that the werewolf would want to rape the mudblood.

Malfoy shook his head to rid his mind of the image. He consoled himself by at least thinking that the screams would be music to his ears, and he signaled for his men to attack the house.

As per standard death eater attack tactics, the eight members of the actual assault team charged the house. Malfoy and his command group watched as the door to the house was kicked open and the eight men charged inside. Malfoy expected the lights of spells being cast, even though he did not think that a single witch can hold the line against his eight men, so when no flashes of light came from the windows of the house, he visibly got worried.

He motioned for Greyback and his second to follow him, and he made his way to the house, intent on checking up on why no one is

casting anything. Unfortunately, the moment that his right foot stepped on the floor of the house, the house disappeared with a massive explosion.

Malfoy, Greyback and his second were the lucky ones. They were still outside the house when the explosion happened, so they were just thrown into the air and onto the sidewalk with relatively minor injuries.

Malfoy was missing an arm and a leg; both were completely severed from his body, while his one remaining arm was badly mangled. Greyback lost an arm, completely severed from his body, while his other remaining limbs were badly mangled. The other death eater was missing both legs, and both his arms were badly mangled. They were unconscious after the explosion, and because it was muggles who operated on them, they were forced to remove all mangled body parts, unaware that magic can easily repair those damages.

Despite that, Malfoy and his companions were the lucky ones, as the news services were later to report. Of the eight death eaters inside the house, only two bodies were recovered, the six others, completely pulverized in what can only be a gas explosion.

THIRTEEN

King's Cross Station

London, England

The black Jaguar XJ sedan pulled into the parking area of the station without much fanfare. Its driver easily found a parking space and took it, and once the car was parked, he helped his passengers grab their things, which they have placed at the trunk of their car.

Harry and Hermione both glanced towards the skies as they helped Dan and Al with their luggage. Up to their front, Emma watched as well, her eyes never leaving the young couple that she is now watching as the said young couple watched the steadily deteriorating weather condition.

Many things were going over the mind of Emma Granger as she watched her daughter and her son-in-law. She was of the opinion that the two of them should not return to their school, she might not be a witch, but she is aware of the dangers that her children are going to face when they reach their school. The knowledge that Al had placed some of Harry's men near the school was not enough to calm her nerves.

Harry and Hermione both turned towards their mother. Harry looked at her with reverence; Emma Granger might not be able to replace Lily Potter as Harry Potter's mother, but she had done a fine job in trying to fill that emptiness that Harry had felt since the death of his mother. He would be eternally thankful to her for that.

As Harry watched Emma Granger discreetly watch them, he felt her unease with this business. The Potter heir had known that Emma had been one of the most vocal critics of his and Hermione's decision to return to Hogwarts. Of course, she trusted them both enough to make their own decision. It was just that she does not think that the decision that they made is the correct one.

Harry opened her mouth to reassure her once again that he and Hermione would be fine, but he was spared from doing so when Harry saw Dan move towards her as he dragged Hermione's luggage. The two senior Granger's looked at each other, and then

Emma nodded, she looked at Harry and smiled at him, before she turned towards her daughter and smiled towards her as well.

Al joined them, he dragged Harry's luggage, and then looked at both Harry and Hermione, he nodded once in approval of the clothes that they are wearing, before he motioned for them to head towards the station.

Both Harry and Hermione were wearing casual polo shirts and jeans. Both were also wearing jackets with long sleeves, this helped them conceal the fact that they are carrying concealed lethal weapons, which are their wands.

Al would have preferred sending them with a whole variety of concealed pistols hidden among their persons, but since they are entering a muggle public transportation terminal, the battle wizard forewent that. Aside from the fact that Harry and Hermione are already armed with their wands, being caught with a concealed pistol is more than enough to send someone to a six by six cell at the nearest police station. It, however, did not stop Al from magically concealing two SiG-Sauer P226 pistols, the preference of both Harry and Hermione, in both of their luggage.

At the barrier between Platform nine and ten, Dan and Emma hugged both Harry and Hermione goodbye. Since they are muggles, they would not be able to enter the magical platform, and for security reasons, Al had asked them to not enter the platform as well, even if they are able to. Obviously, the battle wizard was unsure if he can protect four people in the magical platform.

Harry made a discovery that morning, well, actually, two discoveries.

The first was that he liked Emma Granger's hugs. Externally, they are very similar to the hug of Molly Weasley, but Harry found that while the hugs of the Weasley matriarch was suffocating and demanding, the hugs of Emma were just the opposite. They are warm, and the hug gave him a fuzzy feeling that he is loved. It was a feeling that Harry only feels whenever Hermione would hug him, which, given the recent circumstances, happen every night.

The second thing that Harry had discovered was how much he and Dan Granger are alike. The only Granger male had hugged his daughter first, but since he has a reputation to maintain, refused to

hug Harry openly and instead, shook hands with his son-in-law. As Dan let go of Harry's hand, he added to him, "Make sure that Hermione is safe at all times, she means the world to me"

Harry nodded, "She means the world to me as well, sir, I would not let anyone or anything harm her, you have my word" he replied.

After that, Harry and Hermione entered the magical platform together, Al following behind them.

Already, the platform was filled with people. Students were piling aboard the scarlet colored train, while parents offered last minute advice and a few hurried goodbyes to their children.

Harry and Hermione both blinked, as they allowed the familiar feeling of being in a magical platform envelop and consume them. True, Potter Island is magical, but it is not as magical as Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, or Hogwarts itself.

"Harry, Hermione" Al said, the married couple turned towards him, and he said, "Hec and one of the galleons have now taken position below the Hogwarts lake, if you need any help, they would be more than willing to help you" he sighed once before he added, "the wards prevent my non-magical people from seeing the castle itself, but I have enough magical people in the company that I've sent to observe the castle"

Both Harry and Hermione nodded, "We'll be careful Al" Hermione replied for the two of them.

Al nodded, "See that you do" he replied, using a tone of voice that reminded Harry and Hermione of the drill sergeant that Al had unceremoniously dumped them on when they began their first day of training at Potter Island, "Use the mirror that Sirius had given you liberally, Harry, its untraceable magic, and Hermione" Al turned towards Hermione, "do watch over him as he watch over you, and once you have changed for your robes, get the guns, its on your trunks"

Both Harry and Hermione nodded, though both looked as if they would rather not have this conversation again, Al, however, had one final warning for the two of them, "Harry, Hermione, one last note"

the battle wizard said, "Control your temper at all times, and always stay together, you cannot stay together if one of you is in detention"

Harry and Hermione were saved the need to reply when a red haired boy and girl made their way towards them. Al watched them from the distance and saw that their mother followed behind her two youngest children.

"Hey mate" Ronald Weasley said as he joined Harry, Al watched as the youngest Weasley boy turned a green shade of envy when he saw the clothes that Harry was wearing. They might be casual polo shirts, but even Ronald Weasley can tell that they were not cheap. The fact that both Harry and Hermione were wearing near identical shirts must have also added to the green shade that the boy was wearing, just as the fact that Al had been talking to the two of them had.

Ginny Weasley cringed involuntarily as she looked at Al. the battle wizard guessed that the youngest Weasley child can still remember how he nearly exposed her to be a love potion user, but then Ginny visibly brought herself up to full height and turned her attention towards Harry. Al decided that that was probably because they have been told that he is not Anton Rosseu after all.

Harry and Hermione held hands. They did not even bother trying to hide this fact from the two Weasley's. Harry and Hermione turned towards Ron and then Harry said, "Ron, we have news for you and Ginny" he looked at Hermione just as she looked at him, and then he turned back towards Ron, "Hermione and I are together now"

Ron blinked as his mind registered the words that Harry had used, and then he blinked again when his mind registered the words, and then he blinked again as he realized the implications of the words that Harry had used, "So" the boy, whose face had turned as red as his hair, said, he looked at Harry and Hermione and said, "You always get everything Potter" he snarled.

Ginny blinked as well, and then she blinked again, she let out a primeval cry and then extended her hands towards Hermione, with the probable intent of strangling her. Al, however, moved faster, and before Ginny can take a step forward, Al had already blocked her path, causing Ginny to stumble into the floor.

"How dare you!" Molly Weasley shouted after she watched her daughter stumble into the floor, "You attacked a pureblood, you insolent half-blood"

As Harry and Hermione have already been informed of the real Molly Weasley, neither reacted as the woman said things that neither had expected her to say, instead, Harry and Hermione merely watched on, bored. Both are aware that Al is more than capable of pulling the teeth off of Molly Weasley.

"How dare you call me a half-blood!" Al replied, his voice was a notch or two higher than that of Molly, "I am Alvin Charles York, heir to the York family, and you" he sneered at Molly Weasley, he pretended to examine the shocked woman, and then his sneer returned in full force, "obviously a Weasley, so that would make you lower than me on the social ladder" he looked at the two Weasley children, and then his eyes lingered on Ginny before he turned back towards Mrs. Weasley, "take care not to insult me further woman, your daughter has attacked me and I can legally claim her as compensation" he snorted, "Be thankful that I am not into redheads" and without saying anything else, he shepherded Harry and Hermione away from the stunned redheaded trio.

"Like I would touch her daughter even if she was not a redhead" Al muttered under his breath as he helped the equally stunned Harry and Hermione up the train carriages. Both had no idea that Al can act as if he brought the pureblood superiority doctrine so well, and both had no idea that Al's sneer can shame the one on Lucius Malfoy's face.

Harry and Hermione watched as Molly and her two youngest recovered from the dressing down that Al had given them. Al turned towards them, and Harry guessed that the battle wizard sneered at them, because he watched the Weasley matriarch cringe as Al watched them. Al turned towards Harry and Hermione and said, "Now that that is done, I do not think that those two red heads would bother you in the train," he smiled, "if they do, Harry, tell them that your guardian is now considering claiming Ginny," he nearly laughed as he added, "Let's see how Molly would handle that one"

"You're not seriously going to claim her are you Al?" Hermione asked.

Al smiled and shook his head, "Of course not" he replied, "I told you, I am not into red heads, I prefer combination brunettes and blonds," he smiled, "and I prefer them to be nearly the same age as me, of course"

Harry and Hermione nodded, and at the same time, a whistle sounded from somewhere, signaling that the train was about to depart, "Right you two" Al said, "Go find a compartment to share" he winked at them, "I doubt that you'll find a private compartment just for the two of you, but you might get lucky, so I guess that I would wish you some luck with that"

Harry and Hermione did not blush. They had grown used to the teasing of Al, Remus and Sirius. Even Dan and Emma would sometimes join in with the teasing and if Hermione's parents cannot get a reaction from her, then neither would Al get a reaction from her.

True to Al's predictions, Harry and Hermione failed to find a 'private' compartment that the two of them can share. They had searched from one end of the train to the other, and as they were coming back to see if they can find a compartment that they can share, they ran across Neville Longbottom. Apparently, the Longbottom heir was also looking for a compartment.

"We can share this one" Harry said as he looked at a compartment, "there is only one person inside."

Neville muttered something about not wanting to disturb anyone, but Harry and Hermione merely smiled. Harry opened the door, and then struck his head inside, "Excuse me" he said, "would you mind if we join you?"

The sole occupant of the room, a girl with waist length dirty blonde hair that gave off an aura of distinct dottiness, looked over at Harry and his companions, and then she shook her head, "Help yourselves" she said.

Harry and Hermione thanked her as they pulled their luggage into the compartment. Harry then helped Neville pull his luggage in, and once they were done, they took their seats, Harry and Hermione sat together, while Neville sat beside the girl. Hermione opened the cage that she was carrying, and a ginger colored cat slowly walked out of the cage. Crookshanks purred once before she rested on

Hermione's lap, and she started to absently stroke him behind his ear.

"I'm Hermione" Hermione said, she turned towards their unknown companion as she said that, and then she pointed towards Harry and Neville, introducing the two of them.

"Pleased to meet you, Hermione, Harry and Neville" the girl said as she greeted each one of them in turn, "My name is Luna, Luna Lovegood"

"Pleased to meet you as well Luna" Harry replied with a smile. He looked the girl over and decided that he would want her as his friend. Beneath the weird and quirky aura, Harry can sense power. He just needed one look at her to know that she is a powerful witch.

Hermione gently nudged Harry at the ribs after she caught him staring at Luna for a few moments more than necessary, but both Harry and Hermione knew that it was nothing more but a good natured ribbing. The married couple knew that they would never look at another person the way that they look at each other.

Apparently, however, Harry was not the only one who was staring at Luna. In fact, Hermione nudged her husband in the ribs to divert his attention towards Neville, who was openly staring at Luna. His mouth might not be open, but he is giving the distinct impression that it is.

"Nev" Harry said, stealing the attention of the Longbottom scion. Neville turned towards them, Harry smiled and asked, "How was your summer?"

Neville brightened, he dug the hand that was not keeping a firm grip on Trevor, his toad, into his schoolbag, and after a little bit of rummaging, he pulled out what appeared to be a small gray cactus in a pot, except that it was covered with what looked like boils rather than spines.

"Mimulus mimbletonia" Neville said proudly.

Hermione blinked, "they are supposed to be very, very rare" she said, her excitement showing as she continued to speak.

"Well, yeah" Neville replied, "my great-uncle Algie got it for me in Assyria, and I am going to see if I can breed from it"

Harry and Hermione nodded, the two were aware that Neville's favorite subject was Herbology, "Does it do anything Nev?" Harry asked.

At that precise moment, the door to their compartment slid open.

"Oh ...hello Harry" a nervous voice said. Harry and Hermione turned towards the source of the voice and saw a very pretty girl with long, shiny black hair standing in the doorway, smiling at him: Cho Chang, the Seeker on the Ravenclaw Quidditch team.

"Hi" Harry said with a neutral tone. He would admit that he had a crush on the girl, but he was long gone past that now, especially since a much more beautiful girl was seated beside him.

Cho noticed that, she blinked and then she turned toward Hermione, "Hello, Hermione" she said, "Aren't you supposed to be with the Prefects?"

Hermione shook her head and smiled. Only Harry was able to see that the smile on the face of his wife was predatory, "No" she said, "I turned down the badge because Harry did not get his"

"I see" Cho said darkly, he glanced at Harry and then said, "Well, I'll see you" she did not give anyone a chance to say their goodbyes because she closed the compartment door at the same time.

"What was that about?" Harry asked Hermione.

Luna opened her mouth to say something, but then thought better of it, perhaps she realized that Neville had returned to staring at her, leaving Hermione to explain what had just happened to her husband, "She likes you"

Harry blinked, and then he started to laugh silently. After a few moments, Harry stopped laughing and turned towards his wife, "Too bad for her then" she said, "I was crushing on her when I was in third year, but now" he eyed Hermione and gave her a warm smile, "Why should I chose Cho Change over a witch who is as beautiful as she is smart?"

"Flatterer" Hermione replied, she gently pinched Harry's cheeks after she said that, causing both Neville and Luna to look at them with questioning looks. Hermione looked at the two of them with a confused expression, and then she blinked as she realized why the two are confused, "oh for heaven's sakes" Hermione said, "Harry and I are together now"

At that moment, the compartment doors opened again and Malfoy and his three goons struck their head in, "You and the mudblood Potter?" he asked.

Harry did not reply, he merely looked at Malfoy, smirked at the blond boy, and then started to laugh like there is no tomorrow. A few moments later, Hermione joined her husband in the laughter.

"What's so funny scarhead?" Malfoy asked, trying his best to control his temper and losing quite fast.

Harry and Hermione stopped laughing for a few moments, they took advantage of that time to study Malfoy and his goons again, but before anyone can say anything, Harry and Hermione started to laugh again.

A red faced Malfoy slammed the compartment door shut, but unfortunately for him, he forgot that his hand was in the way. When he slammed the door, his hand was still in the frame, and he yelped in pain as he felt the pain in his hand.

His girly scream made Harry and Hermione laughed harder, and to a lesser extent, Neville and Luna joined in with the laughter, the blond girl laughing harder than the three of them combined.

"Just like you said, love" Hermione said after they had stopped laughing.

Harry nodded, "I told you so dear" he replied as he wiped away the tears in his eyes that resulted from too much laughing, he looked at Luna and Neville and explained, "You see, Nev, Luna, I think that Malfoy is gay"

"He is in his fifth year, but all he has for companions are Crabbe and Goyle," Hermione explained, "It made us wonder why that is the

case, and one of the conclusions that we came up is that Malfoy is gay"

Harry nodded, "I mean, he has been following me since first year" he said, "I do not want to break his heart, of course, but to tell you guys the truth, I do not swing that way" he looked at Hermione fondly, before he added to Neville and Luna, "I am with the most beautiful and smartest witch in our batch now, someone who understands me far better than I understand myself, so why should I entertain Malfoy and his gay buddies?"

The four started laughing again, until Neville brought Ron up, "Where is Ron?" he asked.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other darkly, before Harry turned towards Neville and explained, "Ron, Ginny and Mrs. Weasley did not take kindly to Hermione and I being together, Ron tried to assault us earlier in the platform, but Al was able to stop them"

"I always thought that it was wrong for the two of you to be friends with Ronald" Luna said in a sing-song voice, "He is always jealous of Harry, always complaining that Harry has everything without realizing that he has one thing that Harry does not have"

Harry nodded, "Parents" he replied sadly, "And a family" he brightened, however, as he added, "But I have a family now, Al, Remus, Dan, Emma" he smiled as he looked at Hermione fondly once more, "you"

Hermione smiled at her husband and nodded, without saying anything, she threw her hands over him, "And we would always be together" she said, "we would grow old together, we would have children, and we would watch them grow, and our children would have children, and we would watch their children grow, and..." she paused, and then looked at Harry with an unspoken happiness evident in her eyes.

Harry nodded, "You are my life now, Hermione" he declared in front of Luna and Neville, "my past, my present, my future, you are mine to protect and to care and to cherish, just as I am yours"

"What about Ginny?" Neville asked, he felt uncomfortable with the blatant show of affection between his two friends, so instead of going through it, he decided to interrupt, "I noticed that she is not with you as well"

Harry and Hermione sadly shook their heads, "Ginny did not take kindly with us" Harry repeated, he looked at Neville and said, "Nev, I know you liked Ginny, but I do not think that it would be advisable"

"Ginny is in love with the boy-who-lived" Luna stated matter-of-factly.

"Harry?" Neville asked.

Harry shook his head, "No, not me" he replied, "but with my legend," he sighed and elaborated, "If I was not the boy-who-lived, Ginny would not be in love with me," he glanced at his wife and smiled as he added, "the difference between her and Hermione, is that my love would love me even if I am not the freaking boy-who-lived"

"We always thought that that was the case" a voice from outside the compartment said, the compartment door slid open, revealing two identical red-haired men. Fred and George did not ask permission to walk into the compartment, they just invited themselves in.

"Guys" Harry said, his hand almost casually moved to his pocket where he kept his wand. On his peripheral vision, he saw Hermione do the same.

"None of that now" George said, he smiled at Harry and Hermione as Fred finished what his brother started, "We are not here to start a war with our largest investor"

"Why are you here then?" Hermione asked.

Fred sighed, George rolled his eyes. One of the twins retrieved a magazine from his robes and handed it to Hermione who instantly recognized it as a copy of the same Wizzarding Times that Al had shown them.

"You do not honestly believe that our father was not infected by a love potion don't you?" George asked, "because if you do, then –"

" – we would be the only ones who do think so, you see – "

" – dad never made it to St. Mungo's, Dumbledore – "

" – rerouted the emergency portkey to the Burrow – "

" – we tried to convince the dingbat to send dad to St. Mungo's, but
– "

" – Twinkle-eyes says that for the greater good, none must know, so
– "

" – we are wondering if you two – "

" – would like to help us."

Harry nodded, "We suspected as much" he admitted, he motioned for the twins to take a seat, fortunately, both chose to sit beside Neville, "The man who cast the spell was convinced that something was wrong, but we cannot move without knowing what your dad has been infected with"

"What do you need us to do?" George asked.

Harry looked at Hermione who nodded, before he turned back towards Fred and George, "A way to get your mother out of the burrow for a good three hours"

FOURTEEN

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Harry felt satisfied about the plan that he and the Weasley twins have come up with in order to remove Molly Weasley from the Burrow. Both Fred and George have assured Harry that by the time that the dusts of their latest prank have settled, Molly Weasley would be summoned by the Headmaster himself and she would be gone from the house for more than three hours.

Using a communications mirror that Sirius had given him before he left for Hogwarts, Harry had informed the 'Home' team, Sirius, Remus, Al, Dan and Emma, about this development, and Al had assured Harry that he would have a team ready to raid the Burrow by next week. It was more than enough time for Fred and George to prepare for whatever it is that they are planning.

There was a bit of a disagreement, however, since Fred and George refused to say what they are planning to do. It was Hermione who was adamant that the two of them, Harry and herself, be on the loop as to what is going to happen, but the twins were adamant about the need to keep 'operational security' in regards to their plots. It made Harry laugh.

As Harry helped Hermione off the carriage that had delivered them from Hogsmeade station to the school, he glanced towards the two who had accompanied them in the same carriage, Neville and Luna.

Ron and Ginny had tried to be the ones to accompany Harry and Hermione, but because the prefects have their own carriages, Ron was unable to do so. Harry and Hermione glared at Ginny as the red head tried to join them in the carriage, and that was the only thing that they needed to do to get her to whimper and run away in the opposite direction. Harry saw that she shared carriages with Lavender Brown and the Patil Twins.

Harry was not surprised to find out that Neville would side with him. Right after Harry and Hermione informed him about this summer and the plots against him, minus the fact that he and Hermione are now considered married, of course, and the part about Al's many

secret identities; the Longbottom heir was just a notch below swearing on his family honor to help Harry. Hermione suspected that if that were to happen, Neville would also swear his entire family to the Potter cause, and, from her readings about the Potter family, she knew that no one would find that surprising.

It was Luna who was the one who surprised Harry and Hermione the most. Both are aware that Luna and Ginny were childhood friends, it came up when Hermione asked the red head why she decided to depend on a diary to counter her loneliness, and so, Harry and Hermione had expected that Luna would side with her friend.

She proved them wrong, however, and belatedly, both Harry and Hermione realized that they should have thought about it when they realized that Luna was the one who told them about Ginny being in love with the Boy-Who-Lived.

Harry and Hermione decided to trust Luna there and then, though the couple had also decided that they would be observing her. With the Marauder's Map on their hands, and with the assistance of the House-Elves of Hogwarts, who have rallied under Dobby, Harry was certain that they could cover the movement of any person in the castle that he would like to monitor.

One thing, however, that disturbed Harry was the fact that the horseless carriage that carried the students from the station to the school was no longer horseless. The first time that he looked at these horseless carriages, he was reasonably sure that it was magic who did the leg work, but now, he can see the creature who was pulling the carriage. He was disturbed when he pointed out the creatures to his companion, and only Hermione and Luna had believed him that the creatures exist, mostly because Luna claimed that she can see them as well and because Hermione announced that she can feel them, and she knew that her husband would never lie to her.

When the carriages entered Hogwarts, Harry was once again in awe of the castle. As he looked at the towering spires of the magical school, Harry thought about the first time that he saw the castle, and his subsequent feelings that the castle is his home. As he sat at the carriage now, entering the castle for the beginning of his fifth year as a student in the premier magical school in the whole of Britain, he

realized that the castle is his home. He was, after all, Duke of Gryffindor.

Hermione sensed what her husband was feeling, she took his hand and for a few moments, the two of them stared at the castle, blocking the door of the carriage that they had just vacated, blocking Neville and Luna from exiting the said carriage, as they studied, together, the castle. It was their home, it might not be the first place where they had met, but Harry and Hermione realized that the castle was the place where they had gotten to know one another and where they had fallen in love with one another. Even if they were not Duke of Gryffindor and Duchess of Ravenclaw respectively, the fact that they had fallen in love with each other within the massive walls of the castle was more than enough for them to consider the place their home.

Their silent observation of the castle, however, was interrupted a few moments later when a familiar blond boy tried to approach them with his two companions. Draco Malfoy was hell bent on getting some revenge for the humiliation that he had suffered earlier aboard the train. A quick glance at his right hand saw that the compartment door slamming on his hand really hurt.

The Malfoy heir, however, barely got within twenty feet of Harry and Hermione before the castle doors opened. Harry expected Professor McGonagall, so he was surprised when it was Professor Snape who stepped out of the castle first. The Head of Gryffindor followed her Slytherin counterpart by a mere ten seconds, but it was still a considerable lead.

Hermione felt her husband tense as he saw the potions master, but Professor Snape ignored Harry and instead, headed straight to his, arguably, favorite student. The greasy haired potions professor practically dragged Draco Malfoy out of earshot of the rest of the student population, save for Crabbe and Goyle, both needed Malfoy to tell them that they are not needed and Malfoy failed to do so.

The two Slytherin's, professor and student, conferred for a few moments. The fact that Professor Snape had gone out of his way to greet the returning students had caused a stir among the crowd and all attention was towards the two. Everyone, therefore, was watching when Draco Malfoy screamed, at the top of his lungs, "No!"

Subsequent to these events, Draco Malfoy disappeared from school for two weeks. No one was sure why he did so, but everyone assumed that it had something to do with his conversation with his head of house. Unfortunately for Draco, Fred and George were one of those who witnessed what happened. Within a few hours after the welcoming feast, the rumor that Draco is nursing a broken heart because his head of house, and lover, had broken up with him was making the rounds.

"What do you suppose was that about?" Harry asked his wife as soon as they entered the Great Hall. The Great Hall was exactly as Harry remembered it, with the five long tables, one for each of the four houses and one for the staff, and the enchanted ceiling showing the sky outside.

"Don't know, don't care" Hermione replied. She took a seat at the table, and Harry sat beside her. Ron tried to seat beside Hermione as well, but Neville, who saw what the red headed fifth year was about to do, decided to take the seat beside Hermione. Fred and George then took the seat beside Harry, leaving Ron to seat beside his fellow fifth year prefect, Lavender Brown.

At the staff table, Professor Dumbledore watched the seating war with a calm expression on his face. Inwardly, however, he seethed as he realized that one of his two deep cover agents in the Potter camp had been denied a seat beside the Potter heir. That meant that Harry Potter had discovered that Ron is acting against him. The question in the headmaster's mind, therefore, is if his other agent in the Potter camp, have been discovered as well, unaware that not only were his agents already discovered, they had also been rendered toothless, along with the rest of his, Dumbledore's, camp.

After arranging the seats, Harry and Hermione looked towards the staff table, and were unsurprised to find the senior undersecretary seated at the usual position of the DADA professor. The rest of the school, however, was surprised, though Harry clearly saw that those whom he had always thought had sense were not. He decided that they either must have heard about the appointment or they had read the news article that was published along with the account of his trial.

Harry and Hermione, however, were surprised when they saw that Professor Grubby-Plank, and not Hagrid, was seated on the seat that was usually reserved for Care of Magical Creatures professor.

Harry felt a gentle pressure on his forearm as Hermione silently warned him about asking the question outright.

Harry nodded slowly, he was careful not to make those around him see him nodding, but it was unnecessary, because at that moment, all attention was on the doors of the Great Hall as the first years entered for their sorting ceremony. As was expected, Professor McGonagall led the first years in the center aisle and then placed a stool with an old wizard hat before him.

Attention was now on the old hat. The whole school waited with bated breath. Then the tip near the hat's brim opened wide like a mouth and the Sorting Hat burst into song.

After the song, the sorting began. Harry and Hermione waited patiently for the end, though both saw that the Gryffindor fifth year prefect was not. The red headed menace watched the sorting with his right hand clutched on a knife and he looked ready to attack the first years. He never even clapped once when Gryffindor received a student.

The only time that Ron calmed down was when the food finally arrived, though he calmed down only for a few moments before he leapt, figuratively, of course, on the food and filled his plate with everything that he can see. As he was busy with his food, he did not notice the people inching away from him.

Harry and Hermione ate calmly. Since they had chosen a seat away from Ron, they did not have to slowly inch away from him. They did move in their seats, but only to make way for those who were unfortunate enough to have found themselves seated beside the red headed food disposal machine. The couple would have preferred feeding each other, they have discovered this rather pleasurable action during their time at Potter Island when they chanced upon Dan and Emma feeding one another, but decided that that would raise too many eyebrows, and raised eyebrows are the least of things that the couple needed right now.

The couple also detected an unusual substance in their pumpkin juices, but having been taught by Al on the proper wandless switching spell, both couples switched their pumpkin juices with some from the Slytherin table. Needless to say, those love potions,

for the couple assumed that they were, were drank by someone from the house of the snakes.

The feast ended earlier than usual, again, Ron was the last one to stop, and apparently, the feast ended because everyone who saw him devour the food in front of him lost their appetite. Ron, in fact, was not yet done, but even his master has limits on watching him eat.

Professor Dumbledore then had his customary welcoming remarks recited before the combined student population. Harry and Hermione were unsurprised that the DADA professor thought to disturb the headmaster, but the headmaster was kind enough to let the toad-woman take center stage.

Professor Dumbledore clapped after her speech, and the staff, out of respect for the headmaster, followed his lead. The rest of the student population tried to follow suit, but since they were unaware when the toad-woman had stopped sprouting words, for very few people actually paid attention to her, they did not had the chance as Professor Dumbledore continued what it was that he was saying.

Never in the history of Dumbledore being headmaster had a teacher interrupted him during his welcoming remarks, but the headmaster took it in stride and allowed the DADA professor to do so. The headmaster, however, was unprepared for what happened next.

As he opened his mouth to continue his remarks, he espied a raised hand from among the crowd. Professor Dumbledore paused once again, and students turned their attention towards the owner of the hand. Harry and Hermione recognized her as a fifth year from Ravenclaw, and both smirked as they realized what Anthony Goldstein was about to ask.

Professor Dumbledore acknowledged the fifth year, who promptly stood up and bowed to the headmaster, "Headmaster, I am sorry to interrupt your remarks sir" the fifth year said, "but I have a question for Madam Umbridge please"

Professor Dumbledore would have asked the fifth year Ravenclaw to reserve his question for his first DADA class this year, but Umbridge thought that the pureblood fifth year was just going to ask some clarifications about her own welcoming remarks. She unwisely cut

off the headmaster again and motioned for Anthony to continue with his question.

Anthony Goldstein was not concerned about the war between Harry Potter and the Ministry, or the war between the Ministry and the Headmaster when he raised his hand. In fact, his only concern when he raised his hand was his own.

Anthony Goldstein turned towards the DADA professor and mercilessly asked her, "Madam, how do you expect to teach us, especially us fifth year students who are going to have our OWL's this year, defense if you haven't even achieved a mastery on the subject? How, in fact, are you going to teach us if you barely scrapped an acceptable on the same subject after taking it three times?"

Harry nearly laughed out loud, but was stopped from doing so by Hermione, who again gently placed her hand on his forearm to forestall him. Harry glanced at his wife and saw that she too was about to burst into laughter at that question, but had the common sense not to do so.

Harry looked around the hall and saw that several of the students had the same reaction as him and Hermione. Several looked ready to burst into laughter, and the entire Ravenclaw table was nearly there.

Needless to say, Professor Umbridge was angry. She stared daggers at Anthony Goldstein, but the pureblood just stared back at the incompetent professor, "Detention" Professor Umbridge announced.

"It's an expected question, Professor Umbridge" the tiny Professor Flitwick, head of Ravenclaw house, said. The charms professor pondered for a few moments before he continued, "I think that Professor Umbridge should explain this to her students right here, right now"

Professor Umbridge turned around on the small professor. Harry assumed that the toad thought that the height of the charms professor was an indication of his bravery and so, the toad-woman replied, "I do not need a filthy half-breed like you to instruct me on conducting ministry approved education"

Professor Flitwick stared at the toad for a few moments, his face red. He was about to call the DADA professor out on a duel, but he was unable to issue the challenge because every single member of the staff, save for Dumbledore, stood up, drew their wands, and pointed it at Umbridge. It was pretty clear that everyone wanted to call the new DADA professor out on a duel.

"In my years of teaching at Hogwarts" Professor McGonagall said, "I have never heard of a teacher insulting another" she stared daggers at the toad-woman, "I call you out on a duel, Filius is a great friend of mine and a thousand times better than you as a person"

"I second those sentiments" Professor Sprout, head of Hufflepuff house, said.

"As do I" Professor Snape replied. No one found it surprising that the head of Slytherin would side with the Head of Ravenclaw. Severus Snape may be hated by students but he was a professional who kept a very good professional relationship with his colleagues. He might not be great friends with Filius Flitwick, but the potions master respected his former teacher well enough to come to his aid.

Other sentiments followed from the other members of the staff, but Professor Flitwick stopped anyone of them from calling the toad woman out further by issuing his own challenge. Wisely, the diminutive professor decided to issue a challenge that Professor Umbridge cannot, in good manner, decline, and it was by insulting the said professor.

"I may be a 'filthy half-breed' as you put it" the charms professor said, "but at least I carry human genes in me, I am afraid that I cannot say the same for you, although I must commend you for your perseverance, I mean, it must have taken a toad like you years before you can even comprehend the concept of the animagus transformation"

Harry decided to laugh out loud at the insult. His laughter broke the dam that had allowed the students to keep a straight face. Within a few moments, everyone was laughing, but Professor Flitwick was not yet done, "Realizing this, toad-face, I would not want to appear as a bully to my students by challenging you to a duel" he said, "I mean, you have got to be a protected species, only an unfairly

common toad like you could have mastered a transformation meant only for humans"

Umbridge was ready to burst, and when she is ready to burst, her common sense is already gone. She looked at the charms professor and was convinced that she can crush the dueling champion in as many seconds as she could say her name, "I challenge you to a duel" she spat out.

Professor Flitwick looked at her for a few moments, and everyone saw his mouth open as he said 'toad', but no sound came out, "I accept" he said.

Professor McGonagall nearly laughed at the reverse psychology that her friend had used to get the toad to challenge him to a duel. She looked at Professor Dumbledore and saw that the headmaster was about to stop the duel, so Minerva McGonagall decided to take matters into her own hands.

With a flick of her wand, a dueling arena was suddenly erected in front of the staff table. Professor Flitwick and Umbridge made their way there, even as the Headmaster of Hogwarts protested the action of his deputy.

"You both know the rules of a professional duel, no dark spells allowed" Professor McGonagall said, ignoring the protests of the headmaster, "When I count to three, you may begin, one...two...three"

The duel was over right before it began. Everyone who had spent a day in Hogwarts knew that Filius Flitwick was a champion dueler. No one in his right state of mind would challenge a dueling master, especially not Filius Flitwick.

Professor Flitwick allowed Dolores Umbridge to be the first one to cast, and the toad-woman sent a stunning spell towards her opponent. Like many who had faced Professor Flitwick, however, she forgot one crucial thing. Filius Flitwick is four feet tall. The charms professor did not bother to evade or shield himself as the spell streaked over his head.

Having allowed his opponent the first shot, Professor Flitwick sent his own spell. It was a simple disarming spell, but it was quickly

followed by a quick reducing spell. Both spells hit their intended target, the disarming spell removed the wand that Umbridge was holding in her hand while the powerful reducing spell shrunk the DADA professor to a size that would seem diminutive to Professor Flitwick. A few moments later, the shrunken Umbridge was transformed into a toad.

The transfiguration caused the students to laugh out louder.

"Filius, Minerva" Professor Dumbledore said, "I did not think that that was wide"

"She insulted a member of the teaching faculty of this school Albus" Professor McGonagall said coldly, she stared at the headmaster and then added, "By extension, she insulted both you and the school, you might not care about your reputation, Albus, but we care about the reputation of our school"

"Cornelius would not be happy" Professor Dumbledore noted.

"Don't bother with Fudge professor" Harry suddenly said, he stood from his seat, followed closely by Hermione, who held hands with Harry, "He would have greater things to worry about then defending his reverse-animagus undersecretary"

Ministry of Magic Atrium

London, England

Wherever Anton Rosseu goes, reporters are sure to follow.

The Ministry Atrium was once again filled with reporters and flashing cameras as the celebrated wizard lawyer stood in an upraised platform with Sirius Black at his side. Normally, the presence of Sirius at the ministry would have resulted to Minister Fudge calling for dementors to protect him, but the minister was currently behind a locked door, unwilling to face the media after it was revealed that his orders to have an innocent man killed on sight was tantamount to attempted murder. Had Sirius Black been killed, Minister Fudge would have found himself under trail by the International Court of Justice, Magical Division in The Hague.

"Today" Al, appearing as Anton Rosseu but polyjuiced as someone else, said as he looked at the reporters in front of him, "Justice has been served"

Peter Pettigrew had been declared as a fugitive by the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Interpol Magical Division has been alerted and a warrant for the arrest of the rat animagus had already been issued.

"Lord Sirius Black has been declared innocent after being tried by the Wizengamot" Al announced, "As a result of this declaration, the incarceration of my client in Azkaban prison, a stay of thirteen years that resulted to his present appearance, has been declared illegal, and Lord Black had asked me and my legal team to find out why this happened in the first place"

"I am pleased with the result of the research of Anton and his team" Sirius suddenly said, he spoke for the first time since he left the chambers where he was declared innocent of all charges, he glanced at Al, who nodded, before he turned his attention back towards the gathered reporters and continued, "I would be filing an action against the British Magical Government in the near future, in particular, I would like to question why Albus Dumbledore and Cornelius Fudge never gave me a trial"

"Lord Black" a reporter, both Sirius and Al recognized him as the same person who wrote the article about Harry's underage magic trial in the Times, said, "What are you planning to do now?"

Both Al and Sirius felt that they are indebted to the reporter for bringing the world to their side, so both felt honor bound to answer the question, "I would like to visit my godson and his beloved girlfriend" he said, there was a smirk in his face as he said that, but when he opened his mouth again, he was again serious, "it was their letters of encouragement that kept me alive while on the run and it was thanks to them that I was able to contact Anton here and get myself a trial"

"But Harry Potter is on Hogwarts right now" the reporter said, "Since you are going to file an action against the headmaster of the school, would Harry Potter be leaving Hogwarts anytime soon?"

"We do not know" Sirius replied, he pondered for a few moments and then added, "I am Harry's guardian and as such, I would be the one who would decide if he stays at that school. Anton here is good friends with Hermione Granger's parents, I am sure that between the two of us, if Harry decided to leave Hogwarts, we can do so, but we would like to let the two of them decide."

The reporter nodded. He was a smart man who had been chasing and reporting the news for close to twenty years now, he knew when the topic was closed, but he did not understand that the words that Sirius had just uttered was a serious threat to those who knew about the prophecy regarding Harry and Voldemort.

FIFTEEN

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Harry could tell that Albus Dumbledore was confused as to what he had just told the Headmaster, but whatever question that headmaster had for Harry was postponed as the attention of everyone in the Great Hall was suddenly diverted towards a rather unusual owl that had just entered the Great Hall heading straight for Professor McGonagall.

For a few moments, no attention was being directed towards the direction of Dolores Umbridge, though that may be because the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister was currently too small, it would take a magnifying glass to see her.

The effect of the spell cast by the Charms Professor, however, would not last forever, and with a loud pop, Dolores Umbridge was once again standing in front of the staff table, though this Umbridge was different from the one that had been shrunk, for one thing, this Umbridge looked as if she had lost her dinner, lunch and breakfast thanks to the humiliation that was handed to him by the diminutive Charms Professor that he called a 'half-breed'.

Even if she did reappear with a loud pop, however, the attention was now towards Professor McGonagall. It was rare enough for post owls to appear during the middle of dinner, but when you take into consideration the fact that the post owl in question appeared to be the color of gold, you are sure to have every pair of eyes in the Hogwarts Great Hall directed at it.

The owl landed beside Professor McGonagall, and for a split seconds, almost everyone in the room wondered if it had something personal to do with the Transfiguration mistress.

A look at the face of the Deputy Headmistress, however, erased that notion, as Professor McGonagall was looking at the owl with the same surprised expression that the rest of the student population had.

Professor McGonagall carefully removed the letter that the post owl had carried to her, and then the post owl flew away without so much as a nibble of her beak. No one watched the golden owl as it flew away; attention was now on the letter that the Deputy Headmistress had removed from the leg of the owl.

For a few seconds, the castle held its breath as Professor McGonagall read the letter. Observing from their seat, both Harry and Hermione cannot help but think on the absurdity of the situation, after all, the entire student population was stunned because Professor McGonagall received a letter that might or might not be personal.

Their looks of incredulity, however, quickly disappeared when the transfiguration professor stood up and, in a clear voice, said, "Lord and Lady Gryffindor, if you could please join me and the headmaster in the antechamber"

From the look on the face of Professor McGonagall, she had no idea whom she was calling. She did shot a quick glance at the table meant for her house, she already knew that whoever this Lord and Lady Gryffindor are, they came from the House of the Lion.

From the look on the face of Professor Dumbledore, the Headmaster also had no idea whom his deputy was referring to. He just stood there with the same dumbfounded expression on his face that first appeared when he heard Professor McGonagall call for 'Lord and Lady Gryffindor'.

For Harry, it was like Fourth Year once again, when his name was spat by the Goblet of Fire, but unlike last year, this time, he had Hermione with him.

For Hermione, she was worried that someone already knew her new relationship with Harry, but after she thought about it, she realized that nothing had changed. They had told the press that she and Harry are now in a serious relationship, but they never did exactly tell them what that relationship is. Also, there was no mention, in any of the planning sessions that they had with Al, Remus, Sirius and her parents, that they are going to keep their marriage a secret. They just do not want to announce it.

Hermione glanced at Professor McGonagall and the letter that she was holding, and gave a quick sigh as she told herself that the professor referring to them by that title was the same as announcing it in the middle of Diagon Alley.

Hermione gently nudged her husband, gently hitting his ribs with her elbow, so that he would awaken from the stupor that he had found himself in as a result of the request of their Head of House. Harry looked at Hermione, just in time to see her nod once. With a sigh, Harry returned the nod.

Harry and Hermione held hands and then as one, they stood up and walked towards the antechamber. For a few moments, no one noted that the two of them had stood up and are now making their way towards where the transfiguration professor had said she would meet with Lord and Lady Gryffindor, but it was inevitable that someone does.

Unfortunately, that someone was Ronald Weasley.

The Gryffindor fifth year prefect had suspected that Harry would know who the person that their Head of House was referring to is, but never did he imagine that Harry would be that person. Seeing his supposed best mate with Hermione snapped the red head.

Ron's hand flew to his wand and he brought it up. He was about to send a dark curse towards his two best friends when his wand suddenly exploded with such a force that his wand hand was badly mangled. The force of the explosion was so strong that even the occupants of the Slytherin Table, at the opposite side of the hall, found themselves in the middle of a light shower made of the parts of Ronald Weasley's utterly shattered wand.

Soon after that, everyone started pointing at the two of them. Fortunately, by that time, Harry and Hermione had already crossed the threshold into the antechamber.

Professor McGonagall quickly followed her two favorite students, although she would never admit it to their face until they graduated. Professor Dumbledore was a few moments late in following them, but that was because he was still stunned by the announcement of her deputy. The Headmaster entered the antechamber some two minutes after the first three, leaving behind Professor Snape to

coordinate the transfer of Ron from the Great Hall to the Hospital Wing.

Inside the antechamber, Harry and Hermione were shown the letter that was delivered to Professor McGonagall. Harry instantly recognized the handwriting in the letter, it was the handwriting of Al, and in the letter, the Battle Wizard had informed Minerva McGonagall that Lord and Lady Gryffindor is now within the castle, and that they would require married quarters for themselves and a separate apartment for their friends and a few of their personal security guards. The note did not, however, specify who Lord and Lady Gryffindor were.

"I would like to offer my congratulations to you, Lord and Lady Gryffindor" McGonagall said as soon as it became apparent that the two had finished reading the note. She attempted, and failed, to look stern as she looked at the two fifth year and asked, "When were you married?"

At that moment, Albus Dumbledore entered the antechamber and caught the last words that his deputy had said. Needless to say, Dumbledore's face was as red as the Weasley hair, "I would not allow this!" the headmaster bellowed, he looked at Harry and Hermione and said, "You cannot be married!" he complained, "I never allowed it, and as your guardian, Harry, you have to ask for my permission"

"Stuff it where the sun doesn't shine Old Man" Harry replied, the undisguised contempt and anger in the voice of the Potter Heir shocked both Hermione and McGonagall, but neither had any time to voice their outrage, because Harry continued, "I've had enough of your manipulations, and enough of your lies" Harry looked intently at Dumbledore, whose eyes were twinkling madly, "Tell me, where did you spend the money that you have illegally removed from my parent's vaults? Tell me where you have placed those books and tomes that had been in my family vaults for generations" Dumbledore attempted to look as if he had no idea what Harry was talking about, so Harry added, "Remember, those books that you had illegally removed from the vaults"

McGonagall spun around at Dumbledore, "Albus!" she shouted in fury.

"I've no idea what you are talking about Harry" Albus Dumbledore replied. Furiously, he attempted another mind attack at Harry, but found himself being blocked by mind shields that like of which he had never encountered before. Dumbledore attempted to end the passive legillimancy spell, and discovered, to his horror, that he cannot break the mind connection.

Dumbledore then felt something that he had never felt in more than twenty five years, he felt his power being drained from him. He attempted to stop this drain, and to his horror, found that the more he tried to stop the drain, the more powerful the drain becomes. Within a minute after he tried to mind attack Harry, the Old Man fell on the floor unconscious.

"Mr. Potter, what did you do to the Headmaster?" McGonagall demanded.

"He did it to himself Professor" Hermione answered, McGonagall turned towards Hermione just in time to hear her say, "The Headmaster tried a legillimancy attack on my husband, he found out the hard way that Harry's mind shields are stronger than the walls of Hogwarts"

McGonagall was stunned, she looked at the unconscious form of the Headmaster, and then she nodded, she had no choice but to accept the explanation of Hermione. There was no other available explanation after all.

"Very well, I would have the Headmaster transferred to the Hospital Wing as soon as we are done here" the transfiguration professor said, "In regards to the married quarters and your bodyguards"

Harry smiled at his favorite professor, "Hermione and I would take the Gryffindor married quarters, if you don't mind Professor?" he asked, although the question was obviously rhetorical, because even before McGonagall can say anything, Harry continued, "We can also take the Ravenclaw quarters, seeing that Hermione and I are also Duke and Duchess Ravenclaw, but my wife and I decided to stay at our tower"

McGonagall nodded, she made a mental note to check on their claims later. "And the bodyguards?" she asked.

Harry and Hermione looked at one another for a few moments before Harry turned back to Professor McGonagall, "We'll have to talk to the head of our security for that?" he admitted, "What kind of quarters can be provided for them Professor?"

"Well, Hogwarts is a castle, Lord Gryffindor" McGonagall said, "And we have an armory located near Gryffindor tower, I think that that would prove more than enough for the task"

"Please call me Harry when we are alone Professor" Harry said with a shy smile, and then he nodded, "Having their own quarters would prove a boon, but the question is" at this, she turned towards Hermione, "Do we have enough?"

Hermione shrugged, "I imagine that we do" she replied, "After all, Al would not have sent the note without thinking about it"

Harry nodded, he turned back towards Professor McGonagall and said, "Professor, can we have this discussion again tomorrow?" he asked, "I'll have to contact our head of security and ask for the numbers before I can give you the details"

Professor McGonagall nodded, "Very well Harry" she replied. She smiled at the two young students again and offered her congratulations on the two of them being married once again.

London

England

Draco Malfoy had seen better days.

The young Malfoy had been informed several days ago that his father had been sent by the Dark Lord on a mission, but he was not informed on what that mission would be. Draco had fully expected his father to have accomplished the mission, and when his father failed to show, Draco just assumed that the mission would take several days. After all, if his father failed, then the Dark Lord would be showing his displeasure.

Draco scowled as he entered the room where he was assured his father would be. He and his mother had been forced to wait for nearly an hour before the muggle attendants can attend to them.

Draco had been fighting his urge to start killing the muggles, but his mother had warned him about the Statute of Secrecy.

The man lying on the bed at the far corner of the room bore little resemblance to the Lucius Malfoy that Draco knew. His father was currently missing both arms and it appeared as if he was down on his last leg, a leg that was covered in white bandages, just like the rest of the stumps that were once two arms and a leg.

Draco approached his father, but at that moment, the door bust open and four men entered the room. Two of the men were wearing dark suits, while the other two were wearing the uniform of the London Metropolitan Police.

"What is this?" Narcissa asked.

One of the men wearing a dark suit turned towards her and whipped out a badge which he showed to Narcissa, and then he introduced himself, "We are from the CID ma'am" he said, and then he motioned towards Lucius, "Is he your family ma'am?"

Draco nodded, "When my father...." He began, starting his usual threat, but this time, the two men wearing the dark suits actually smiled when he said that.

"Good to hear, young sir" the other man said, he nodded to one of the men wearing the uniform of the Metropolitan Police, and then turned towards Narcissa and said, "Your father is wanted on several charges, including but not limited to murder, homicide, rape, rape with homicide, destruction of property, and kidnapping," he began, "we suspect that he is also a member of a terrorist organization, and Scotland Yard is not the only one who wants a piece of his ass, MI5 and INTERPOL have alert warnings in regards to him, and I was told that even NSA wants to talk with him"

"What proof do you have?" Narcissa managed to ask.

For some reason, the first man wearing a dark suit seemed to have been waiting for her to ask that question, because at that moment, he smirked and replied, "We have the suspect committing murder in broad daylight in front of a CCTV, we have DNA of the suspect recovered from several crime scenes, and" he lowered his voice as

he added, "The suspect might cast a good memory modification spell, but the Obliviators of INTERPOL are much more better, they are also pretty good at recovering memories"

At that moment, both Draco and Narcissa knew that they were screwed, and the worst part of it is, they knew that they are screwed because of their instincts only. The two purebloods have no idea what a CCTV is, what DNA stands for, and what INTERPOL, MI5, and NSA means.

The two men, however, were not yet done, "We also have the same story for the two other men that were brought along with them" the second dark-suited man said in his normal voice, he glanced at Lucius Malfoy and noted the protuberances that were once a leg and an arm, before he turned his steely gaze back at the Malfoy heir, "Your father was one lucky bastard, as are his two companions, they get the chance to regret having done what they had already done, that might lessen their punishment in the other life, there are eight other men who would not have that chance"

Leaky Cauldron

London, England

Walden MacNair was a Death Eater. He was also an executioner for the Ministry of Magic, though most of the victims of his beheadings are dangerous creatures when he is working for the ministry. Death Eaters have no qualms about killing people though.

This particular night, after sending his son to his last year at Hogwarts, he decided to drop by the Leaky Cauldron for a drink. He also intended to count himself lucky tonight at having avoided whatever mission it was that the Dark Lord had sent Lucius and his team to, because not a single one of those men had returned.

MacNair stayed at the bar all day and well into the night. He was so intoxicated by five in the afternoon that he never noticed a strange couple entering. If he did, he would have at least tried to get away early, but unfortunately for him, his attention was on the clear oblivion in his hand rather than on the man and woman who entered the bar holding hands, despite the fact that the man appeared to be at least the father of the woman.

Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks have entered the Leaky Cauldron that afternoon with the express intent of taking Walden MacNair out of the picture. The mission given to them was to observe the target and then to determine when the best time to pick him up would be, preferably, while said target was outside the pub and where no magical beings would interfere.

Fortunately for Remus and Tonks, that time decided to pop at a little after ten when the Ministry executioner decided that he had enough. Both Remus and Tonks watched silently as MacNair reached into his pocket and dropped several galleons into the bar before he walked out of the pub, occasionally stopping as a result of nearly stumbling down.

Neither Remus nor Tonks have any idea how MacNair wished to travel, they just know that it would not be apparition, floo, or portkey. The latter is illegal without permission from the ministry while the first two would require for the traveler to be sober, which MacNair clearly was not. Both Remus and Tonks knew, however, that they should act fast.

Remus and Tonks stood up and paid for their own bill before they followed after MacNair, as they did so, Remus's left hand casually found its way into his pocket. Once there, he pressed a button on the radio that he had secreted away on his pocket, letting the waiting team outside know that their target is on the move and that they can expect action momentarily.

Remus and Tonks spotted their target the moment that they stepped out of the pub, they also spotted their backup at the same moment, it was hard not to notice them since they are inside a large blue container van.

With a subtle nod towards the driver of the van, the van started to move parallel to the sidewalk where MacNair and the two former Order members were. At the same time, Remus and Tonks approached MacNair.

Although both Remus and Tonks were careful and although MacNair was already drunk, the ministry executioner was still a force to be reckoned with, and MacNair easily noted that he was being followed.

The Ministry executioner decided to act casually, but he fully intend to turn the ambush back on the ambushers, and he told himself that once he found an area without many people, he would do so.

Unfortunately for him, neither Remus nor Tonks have any plan of letting their quarry get the upper hand, and neither Remus nor Tonks have to worry about the Statute of Secrecy today, because, simply put, they would not be using magic to take down their target.

In short order, Tonks found herself within a few feet of MacNair, who was still acting drunk. It was more than enough distance, and Tonks casually drew a stun gun from her hidden holster.

Once the former auror was ready, she suddenly shouted, "London Metropolitan Police, stop where you are!" before she brought the stun gun up and then pulled the trigger.

Two cables shot out from the stun gun that Tonks was holding and directly hit MacNair. Within a few heartbeats, MacNair was out cold.

Civilians started to stop at whatever they were doing to look at what happened, but at that moment, the van containing the backup of Remus and Tonks arrived at station and armed men jumped out. Each person was wearing standard London Police SWAT gear so no question was asked. There were also no questions asked when Remus and Tonks helped load the stunned MacNair into the waiting van. The people just assumed that this was a police operation.

Hospital Wing, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Albus Dumbledore regained consciousness just a few minutes after midnight and the first thing that he did was to summon his potions master. Needless to say, Potions Master Snape was less than happy at having been awoken in the middle of the night.

"Severus" Dumbledore said, "I need to know what potions that you have placed in Harry's drink"

Snape sighed, "Love potion keyed to Ginevra Weasley" he replied, "Loyalty potion keyed to you, aggressiveness potion keyed to Dolores Umbridge and Ms. Granger

Dumbledore nodded, "Good" the old man replied, his mind was still playing back the humiliation that he had suffered at the hands of his weapon earlier this evening, "And Ms. Granger?"

"Love potion keyed to Ronald Weasley" Snape reported, "Loyalty potion keyed to you, aggressiveness potion keyed to Dolores Umbridge" he looked at the Headmaster and said, "Are you sure you know what you are doing Headmaster?"

Dumbledore nodded, "For the Greater Good," he began "Harry must be separated from Ms. Granger and he must fall in love with Ms. Weasley" he sighed again and then said, "We also need to weaken the boy's mental shields"

"I thought we agreed on occulumencary lessons?" a confused Snape asked.

Dumbledore shook his head, "Harry already has mental shields, the like of which, you cannot believe" he replied, he sighed, "I fear that Ms. Granger has the same shields and I can only hope that the potions work"

Snape smirked, "by this time tomorrow, Headmaster, those two would be fighting so much that even if they are married, they would be demanding a divorce from one another" he said, "that would give the two young Weasley's the opening that they need to enter their lives again"

Dumbledore nodded, "Let us hope"

Unnoticed by either of the two men, a dragonfly had entered the hospital wing through the use of an open window and had perched itself comfortably at a window sill. If it was an ordinary dragonfly, there would have been no need for the two men to notice it, far less to be alarmed by it, but if they knew what that dragonfly was, they probably would have taken measures to make sure that their conversation would not be spied upon.

Unfortunately for them, they did not notice the dragonfly that was now observing the two of them with its many faceted eyes and hearing their conversation with several tiny listening charms imbedded on its three inch long body.

It was fairly common knowledge that nothing with technology works on Hogwarts grounds, there was far too much magic in the air, and the magic would interfere with the technology. Since most of British Magical society tend to believe what they read, no one thought to challenge these claims.

The Potter family, however, while British, was far more traveled, and more, they have a corps of men and women loyal to them that came from the four corners of the world, men and women who brought the Potter family the chance to mingle both magical and muggle technology. The dragonfly was the brainwork of one of the Japanese technomancers under the employ of the Potter family.

It was nothing more but a drone with miniscule magic canceling runes etched into its very body that prevents the magic in the air from interfering with it.

As Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape continued their conversation and their plans on how to deal with Harry Potter and his wife, they had no idea that every movement that they made and that every word that they said, was being noted by a dedicated crew aboard a Combat Information Center aboard a galleon that was under the surface of the waters of the Black Lake.

SIXTEEN

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Harry lay perfectly content on the bed, his eyes fixed upon his sleeping wife. Even as he stared at her, he could see the sun shining, and because Hermione was the one who was facing towards the sun, it certainly made true the statement, 'to watch the sunrise at your face'.

The two of them were inside the private quarters of the Duke of Gryffindor, though as he and Hermione had looked around their new quarters last night, the two of them thought that it would probably be more apt to just call it an apartment.

This was because the said private quarters had eight different rooms, a common room, a sitting room, kitchen, dinning room, a bathroom that was probably the size of half of a Hogwarts classroom, a training room, and two bedrooms. Of course, Harry and Hermione had decided to just use one of the bedrooms.

The bedroom that they had chosen was the bigger room, it was half the size of an average London flat, complete with its own private bathroom and two walk in closets, each large enough to hold clothes that would last half a year without ever having to repeat said clothes.

The room was decorated much like the common room at Gryffindor tower, though that was hardly surprising since they are in the private quarters of the Duke of Gryffindor, but the carpet was of a richer gold color, and the walls are devoid of any paintings. Hermione believed that the reason for that was because magical portraits can be used to spy on people, so she reckoned that the last person to occupy the quarters had ordered them removed.

Harry carefully stretched as he stifened a yawn, he did not wish to disturb his wife from her sleep, but after he stretched and looked at her, he conceded that it was already too late for that since Hermione was already stirring herself awake.

For a brief few moments after she had woken herself up, Hermione looked at Harry with a confused expression on her face, but Harry

knew that his wife was not confused because of his presence on the bed. The two of them, after all, are well used to it by now, but rather, she was confused because she could not recognize where they were in the short amount of time available to her to recognize her surroundings.

Just as quick as this confusion had arrived at her face, the said confusion vanished as she finally remembered where they were. She cast one glance towards the ceiling of their room, smiled, and then looked back at Harry before she mouthed, "Good morning, my love"

Harry smiled at her, he leaned in closer to her, kissed her lightly on the lips, before he pulled away and smiled at her while saying, "Good morning, my love"

Hermione returned the morning greeting of her husband, and then she playfully pushed him off of the bed. Luckily for Harry, he was well prepared by now, being pushed off your bed every morning since you started to sleep with your wife would do that, and he was able to jump to his feet the same moment that he felt the bed run out under him, earning him a playful frown from the face of his wife.

"I've since learned that being pushed off of the bed can be a painful thing, love" Harry replied, he smiled as his wife started to laugh. Hermione continued laughing while Harry made his way to her side of the bed and gently helped her to his feet. Unlike Hermione, Harry was too much of a gentleman to try anything funny, well, that and he did not really like to irritate a freshly woken Hermione Potter.

Hermione gratefully accepted her husband's offer, and she allowed him to help her to her feet. She saw the appreciative smile on her husband's face, but she chose not to comment on it, since when she saw the smile, she smiled as well, and she knew that it had something to do with her choice of nightdress.

Hermione looked down at herself, and smiled. Mentally, she thanked her mom for introducing her to nightgowns, and she congratulated herself for having the foresight to buy herself half a dozen white short sleeved gowns.

"It's not fair, you know" Harry suddenly said.

Hermione frowned as she looked at her husband, "What's not fair?" she asked, using a tone of voice that they both knew well, it was the tone of voice that she used whenever she was about to launch into rant mode.

Harry smiled at his wife, "You get to seduce your husband with that almost nothing that you are wearing and we are not allowed to progress far enough" he mock-complained.

Hermione smiled, "I seem to remember that it was you who instituted that rule, my dear husband" she replied. She paused for a few moments, and then she added, "Come on, we are going to be late for breakfast".

Undisclosed Location

British Indian Ocean Territory

Walden MacNair was surrounded by white. Even if he kept his eyes closed, which was most of the time, he saw white.

When he regained consciousness, the ministry executioner discovered that he was standing in a deep, cylindrical tube, a kind of a silo. About ten feet high, its walls were perfectly smooth, coated with plaster that had been painted white and then finished with something to make it shine. High beyond his reach were two big flood lamps that burned continuously. There was a total absence of darkness, not even a hint of shadows.

This frightened him. He was used to working in the shadows, after all, and MacNair understood the darkness would protect him. Being placed in the middle of a silo that had nothing but light was more than enough to instill panic in him, for the light somehow communicated to him that he had been caught and not even the Dark Lord would be able to save him.

At first, MacNair thought that it was some makeshift holding cell. That thought actually reassured him. He had had brief experiences with confinement, it was part of his job, both his public and private, but then he discovered that the diameter of the silo was barely large enough to accommodate his shoulders. He could lean a few inches in any direction, but he could not sit down.

After a while, he thought he heard a faint hum, like a bee buzzing in his ear. As the hours passed, the buzzing got stronger and stronger, and the walls, whiter and whiter, before they started to close in on him, and that was when MacNair first closed his eyes, briefly.

When he opened his eyes again, the whiteness was even starker, if such a thing were possible.

MacNair used his mental exercises in an attempt to keep what he recognized was his sanity from slipping. For a while, it helped, but he discovered, to his horror, that no matter how hard he tried, he would always slip.

He figured that his losing battle to get a grip on his sanity had something to do with the white walls that he was seeing, so he closed his eyes and attempted to clear his mind once more.

Again, for a while, it worked, but then the buzzing got stronger, as if a forty ton bee was buzzing its wings right on his ear, then MacNair heard what might have been a scream, a human scream. He had no idea that the sound was coming from him.

Without warning, he staggered back, falling through a concealed door. He felt someone grab his shoulders and drag him outside the place where he was confined. For a brief moment, the whiteness was gone, but then someone slipped a hood over his head, and the white had returned.

"Everything is going to be alright" a gentle female voice that MacNair did not recognize said softly. The voice spoke so softly and so gently that MacNair would have sworn that the person was whispering right beside his ear, "I'm going to take away all the pain" the voice promised, "All if it" she assured him, "You'll have some water, then you can talk to me"

Suddenly, MacNair threw his arms around the source of the voice, holding her as a drowning man would a piece of driftwood. All the while, the voice continued to talk to him and still him, until he was able to take his first halting steps.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Harry and Hermione had their breakfast away from Ron and Ginny Weasley. They were thankful that Neville had kept true to his word that he would cover them, the Longbottom heir had chosen to take a seat beside Hermione during breakfast, while Fred and George did their part by taking the seats that were directly opposite Harry and Hermione.

Since Harry had taken the seat at the edge of the table, he did not need to worry about anyone taking the seat beside him. It was a good thing too, since his attention was mostly towards Hermione during the course of the breakfast.

Fred and George, who were seated opposite them, would later wonder how the two of them, Harry and Hermione, were even able to eat their breakfast when they must have spent the entire breakfast hour staring at one another.

After breakfast was potions class. Surprisingly, Snape appeared to have been in no mood to taunt Harry, and since Malfoy had still to return from wherever he went during the first night, potions class went without a hitch. Snape, it seemed, was wise enough not to provoke either Harry or Hermione after the revelations during the feast.

Harry, working with Hermione, since Ron used to be his partner, was able to produce a perfect example of the potion that they were brewing (the Draught of Peace) that even Snape had no choice but to compliment him on it (it appeared as if you needed five years in order to brew a perfect potion Potter was what he said).

It was not enough to remove the smile that was written on Harry's face.

When they entered the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, they found Umbridge already seated at the teacher's desk. With an audible groan, after all, the entire school had witnessed her humiliation, the class entered the classroom. It could not be denied that almost everyone was hoping that she would be gone from Hogwarts.

"Well, good afternoon" Umbridge said when finally the whole class had sat down.

A few people mumbled, "Good afternoon" in reply, though Harry and Hermione could tell that they only did so because they did not want to appear impolite.

"Tut, tut" said the professor. "That won't do, now, will it? I would like you, please, to reply 'Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge.' One more time, please. Good Afternoon, class!"

Before anyone could reply, a voice from behind the class said, "We are here to study Defense Against the Dark Arts, not etiquette" the voice said.

Everyone turned towards the source of the voice, including Harry and Hermione, with a shocked expression on their faces, but none was more shocked than Professor Umbridge herself. Well, she was at first, but Harry and Hermione were quickly wearing the same shocked expression when they saw that it was none other than Pansy Parkinson who said those words.

Umbridge looked ready to reply, but before she could open her mouth, Pansy added, "I could be spending the day trying to woo Ginny Weasley, yet I am stuck here listening to an oversized toad as she tries to teach us etiquette" she sniggered.

Harry and Hermione blinked and looked at one another. The unasked question, 'who drank the potion last night' was finally answered, and now that they know the answer, they could not help but smile.

"You're right" Blaise Zabini joined his housemate, the rather handsome Slytherin looked at Umbridge with disgust before he turned back to his housemate and added, "Do you think that you and I would be in-laws soon Pansy? I mean, you fancy Ginny and I kind of fancy Ronald" and with that, he cast an almost shy look towards the red-head, who promptly hid under his desk.

If it was physically possible for eyes to pop out, then both Harry's emerald green orbs and Hermione's almond brown eyes would have popped off of their eye sockets. The married couple looked at one another and mentally thought the same thing, 'this was bloody brilliant and insane as well'

"Professor" Pansy said in mock deference, "I recognize that you must be a powerful magical user, after all, not all toads are capable of transforming into humans, but professor, being able to do such a thing is an accomplishment in itself, you do not need to claim that you are an expert in defense, we know that you are an accomplished magical user already"

"Professor" Blaise added, "If anything else, your defeat at the hands of Professor Flitwick had proves that you are not cut out for this course, but I do not think that that is enough of a justification for you to start teaching us etiquette" he promptly stood up, made a show of gathering his things, before he turned towards the professor and said, "I would be taking my leave now," he walked towards Ron and then said, "Would you mind showing me around?"

"Detention!" Umbridge spat out, "Parkinson and Zabini, I would have thought that purebloods like you would behave better than Potter here!"

Now that his name had been dragged, Harry had no choice but to get involved as well. The Duke of Gryffindor stood up from his seat and turned his attention towards his defense professor. The glare that he was giving the defense professor was more than enough to make her cower, "I would appreciate it very much, Professor, if you would refrain from dragging my name into this," he smirked, "After all, it would not do well if the world were to figure out that you are harassing me after you and the Minister lost your case against me"

"I think that what she had just said constituted defamation of character, my love" Hermione suddenly said, "We can sue her for that, I bet Anton and the press would have a field day"

Harry smiled at his wife, "I could already imagine the headlines" he looked at Umbridge, "Incompetent Toad defames the character of Boy-Who-Lived, do you think Fudge would survive the fall out that this would cause, Senior Undersecretary?" he added the last with sarcasm.

"Out!" Umbridge suddenly yelled, "All of you, out of this room now! One thousand points from all of you!"

At that moment, a deep sound, seemingly having come from within the walls of the castle itself, clanged, and for a brief moment,

everyone in the defense classroom could see the fearful expression that was written on the face of their defense professor.

Entertainment, however, was rudely interrupted a few moments later when, with a loud pop that usually accompanies an apparition, Dolores Umbridge disappeared from her classroom, much to the confusion of all the students except for Harry and Hermione.

"Well, it seems that Hogwarts is deciding on her own on that one" Harry commented to his wife.

"I bet that it would be a popular decision, love" Hermione replied.

Professor McGonagall chose that moment to appear in the classroom. She was fully prepared to disturb Dolores Umbridge because there was something that she needed to talk about with the Lord and Lady Gryffindor, so she was pleasantly surprised when she entered the defense classroom and failed to find said toad anywhere.

"She was kicked by the castle, Professor" Harry said in an almost bored tone as the class witnessed Professor McGonagall looking around the classroom, "Needless to say, she would not be coming back"

The edge of the lip of the Scottish Professor turned up, but then she nodded, "Then we would have to look for a new defense Professor" she replied, and then she sighed, "that is not the reason I am here, though," she turned his attention towards Harry and Hermione, "My Lord and Lady Gryffindor" she announced formally, "I would like to speak with you about your bodyguards"

Harry looked at Hermione, who nodded upon meeting the gaze of her husband. Harry nodded back and then turned his attention once more towards the Transfiguration professor, "Lead the way, Professor"

Undisclosed location

British Indian Ocean Territory

Al, Remus and Sirius stood at the edge of the small makeshift room, their gaze concentrated upon the man seated at the edge of the table that was located at the center of the room.

Walden MacNair was a feared man, but after the treatment that he had received, that had changed. His eyes were glassy and washed out, like those of day-old fish on ice. His voice was a monotone, with no timbre or texture to it. When he spoke, it was as though he had been hypnotized.

Seated opposite MacNair was a young woman, no more than twenty five years of age from her looks, with blonde hair. On her lap, covered by a cloth, was a gun, the barrel pointed at MacNair's shoulders, though everyone could see that that was unnecessary, as there were five men armed with FN FAL battle rifles in the room after all. If MacNair were so much as to twitch the wrong way, he would have found himself staring at the business end of those rifles.

The Ministry executioner, however, paid no heed to these men, in fact, to him, these men did not exist. He only had his eyes for the woman who was seated in front of him, his interrogator.

"Are you sure that she can do it?" a clearly worried Sirius asked Al. Beside him, Remus also nursed his doubts in regards to this interrogation method, but the werewolf was smart enough to realize that Al knew what he was doing.

Al smiled, "Hillary was a professional interrogator with the NSA before I met her and recruited her" he replied, "She's the best we have when it comes to interrogators"

Sirius looked unsure, but then he nodded. The marauder understood the reasons why Al had chosen to do the interrogation without veritaserum, but understanding the reason did not make him approve of it. Sirius Black, after all, was a member of a pureblood family, and some of their ideology of magical being superior to muggles has rubbed off on him.

"What is your name, please" the woman that Al had referred to as Hillary had started her interrogation. Her voice was soft, as if she was speaking with a child. Remus and Sirius would not complain about the tone of voice that she used, because, judging from the tone of voice that the ministry executioner had used when he replied, she may as well be speaking with a child rather than a cold-blooded killer. .

Sirius and Remus expected MacNair to start sprouting off his pureblood ideology, so they were pleasantly surprised when MacNair replied, "Walden Christopher MacNair" he replied.

"What do you do?" Hillary asked pleasantly.

"I work as an executioner for the Ministry of Magic in Britain" he replied, he did not hesitate to add, "I also am the executioner of the Dark Lord"

"Name all the Death Eaters that you can remember, please"

MacNair nodded, unaware that at that moment, he was giving the people who would be listening to the tape recorder currently on the surface of the table a list of people that would take them weeks to identify and locate.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Professor McGonagall led Harry and Hermione into her office. Once they were seated, she sealed her office. She was well aware that the Headmaster would want to gatecrash this meeting.

"Now that we are alone, Lord and Lady Gryffindor" McGonagall began, "I would like to ask you about those bodyguards that you have told me about"

"Please call us Harry and Hermione, Professor" Harry replied, he smiled at his favorite professor and added, "You have earned that right, Professor" he said.

"Thank you Mister....Harry" McGonagall replied, she sighed and then looked at Hermione, "You too Hermione"

Hermione smiled, "You were instrumental in helping the two of us find each other professor" she replied, "If not for you introducing me to the magical world, I would not have known Harry, and while I believe that we would have met eventually, I still like this better" and with that, she promptly stood from her seat, made the short crossing to the chair that Harry was using and sat at the lap of her husband.

"Yes" McGonagall agreed, she sighed again before she continued, "About these guards, Harry?"

Harry nodded, "Yes Professor" he replied, "Hedwig returned with a letter this morning" he explained. He noted that the eyes of his professor, and Harry guessed that the transfiguration professor failed to catch Hedwig coming in during breakfast.

Harry would have laughed then and there if the secret was not so important. The reason that Professor McGonagall did not see Hedwig this morning was because the owl was not the one who delivered the letter, in fact, no owl was used, and no letter was delivered. The method of communication was the mirrors.

"Al and a select few of our bodyguards would be heading here tomorrow to have a discussion with you" Hermione added for her husband, "You'll like Al, he is a no non-sense kind of a person"

"He was a Hogwarts student, but did not finish Professor" Harry replied, "Gryffindor house"

"Alvin York, yes I remember him, Harry" Professor McGonagall replied, she smiled fondly, "Does he still claim that defense is his best subject?"

Harry nodded, "Yes, professor" he replied.

McGonagall smiled, "I see" she replied, "then perhaps he would help me fix the problem that his two charges had created" she looked amusedly at Harry and Hermione, both of whom were wearing confused expression on their faces. The Scottish professor decided to cut them some slack and added, "Al York could have taught any class at Hogwarts, but since Defense is the only available, he would have to teach defense"

"But professor..." Hermione began.

"I know that your bodyguards have an official reason to stay, Lord Potter" Professor McGonagall said, she had switched to using Harry's title since this was now formal business, "but having Al here as your teacher is for the other students, surely, you do not want your schoolmates to be taught by that Toad?"

It was the first time that Harry and Hermione had heard their Head of House insult a fellow professor, and they had to admit that it was refreshing, at the least.

Professor McGonagall continued, "Since the Headmaster cannot remove Umbridge without a replacement, I would say that this pretty much solves the problem" she smiled at Harry, she already knew what the young man would say and countered it even before she can say anything else, "You can order him to take the job, after all"

Harry looked at Hermione, who nodded after a few moments. With obvious reluctance, Harry nodded back to his wife before he looked back at the Deputy Headmistress and replied, "I'll get him"

"Excellent" Professor McGonagall replied, "I shall inform the Headmaster that we will have a new defense professor before the week is out", she looked at Harry and asked, "At what time would Professor York be here tomorrow, Harry?"

"A little after lunch professor" Harry replied, he smirked towards his favorite professor as he added, "If you ask me, I think that he just wants to have an audience when he arrives"

SEVENTEEN

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

For an afternoon in the middle of September in Scotland, it was an unusually hot day.

The sun shone as if it was aware that tomorrow it would be covered by the clouds that promised the cold spell that Harry and Hermione, as well as everyone who spent more than a year of their life in Hogwarts, knew very well.

Harry and Hermione stood inside the Quidditch pitch, they held each other's hand, while Harry held a sports jacket on his left and Hermione held her own at her right. Needless to say, both Harry and Hermione were disappointed that they were forced to remove their jackets, for they were planning on surprising everyone with their matching jackets.

Beside them, stood Professor McGonagall, and from the expression on her face, it was clear that she was far from amused at being made to wait at a location exposed to an unusually hot sun in the middle of the day.

Dumbledore, as Headmaster, stood a bit away from the group, but still within earshot. Beside the Headmaster stood the Potions Master, Professor Snape. As usual, the potions master was wore his usual scowl.

Professor Sprout and Professor Flitwick stood nearer, but to the opposite the side that the Headmaster had chosen. Both Harry and Hermione were pleased to note that Umbridge had positioned herself away from anyone.

Hermione gently nudged her husband when she had spotted the toad enter the pitch, forcing Harry to follow her not-so-subtle gaze. The Duke and Duchess watched as the toad stood away from the three groups, but casting occasional glances towards the direction of Professor Flitwick. Obviously, the toad had learned her lesson.

Students from the four houses occupied the seats at the stadium. Although this was not an official event, word had somehow spread that the mysterious bodyguards of Harry Potter and his new wife are coming to Hogwarts and everyone wanted to see them for themselves.

Rumors were already rife, especially among those who believed the ministry's opinion that Harry's bodyguards are nothing more but the core of the army that he is building to take over the ministry. Unfortunately, no one would comment on that, even if technically, it was the truth.

"He sure is taking his time isn't he?" Professor Snape commented after a few minutes of watching the pitch.

Harry glared at the potions master, but he did not glare at the said man for long because the moment that his wife realized that he was glaring at the most hated professor in the entire castle, she gently slapped his arm, forcing him to turn his attention to her, and then back at the pitch.

At that exact moment, those with very good sense of hearing heard something that they had never heard before near Hogwarts.

For the muggle-born and half-blood students, they were familiar with the sound, though they did not really believe that they would hear those sounds near Hogwarts.

For the purebloods, they had no idea what that sound was.

"Well that explains why he took his time" Hermione commented when everyone in the pitch can already hear the approaching sound.

Harry nodded, he turned to his wife and smiled, "I told you he wanted to make an entrance" he said.

Hermione was forced to concede that and nodded.

Two minutes later, the pureblood students of Hogwarts, and almost all of the muggle-born and half-blood students, were treated to a sight they never expected to see, or at least, not in Hogwarts.

Four AH-7 Lynx helicopters, two of them, Harry and Hermione saw, were armed with anti-tank missiles, and four SA330 Puma helicopters appeared on the skies over the Quidditch pitch.

The four Puma helicopters landed first, their pilots executed a perfect four ship short landing roll, their side doors opening at the same time. Each helicopter unloaded twelve fully armed men, all wearing battle dress. The helicopters from where the men had dismounted did not stay in the ground for long, as soon as their dismounts had left the cabin; their pilots executed a perfect four ship short take-off roll and took positions slightly away from the pitch, but within firing distance.

From his vantage point, Harry was able to easily discern the features of Al York. It also helped that at the moment that the helicopters had left the pitch, the battle wizard had made his way towards where he had earlier spotted Harry and Hermione.

As Al was walking towards their location, Harry and Hermione studied the head of the Potter family bodyguards. Al was wearing the same battle dress as his men, though in his case, he was also wearing a boonie hat with a camouflage pattern matching those of his battle dress.

Harry and Hermione also both noted that Al was wearing his usual P226 sidearm at his right side, and had a P-90 sub-machinegun strapped over his torso.

Harry turned his attention towards the rest of the men that had accompanied Al and he nearly hit himself when he realized that all of the forty eight men that had accompanied Al for what was supposed to be only a visit were all fully armed, most with the same P-90 sub-machinegun as Al, but with two or three men sporting their heavier Minimi general purpose machineguns.

When Al reached the spot where Harry and Hermione were waiting, he did not wait for Harry, Hermione, or anyone else, to greet him. Instead, he removed his hat, made a show of studying the gathered crowd, and then turned towards Harry and Hermione and smiled, "Quite a turnout you have here, my lord" he commented dryly.

Harry nodded. The Duke of Gryffindor automatically assumed his business posture and replied, "I imagine that this is what you had

wanted when you selected to make use of attack and tactical helicopters to make your entrance."

Al smiled, "Perhaps" he conceded and turned his attention towards Hermione, inclining his head towards her, greeting her with, "My Lady".

"Hello Al" Hermione replied, gracing the battle wizard with a smile, "Always full of surprises" her smile grew broader as she continued; "it is good to see you again".

"Likewise, my lady" he replied, he again inclined his head towards her and then turned his attention back towards Harry, "By your leave, my lord, I would like to signal the Puma's to return to base, and have the Lynx helicopters land".

"You are not leaving those muggle contraptions in this school!" an enraged voice from behind the staff said.

Everyone turned towards the source of the voice and was unsurprised to see Dolores Umbridge walking, much like a toad, towards the party. She made a move to draw her wand but, unfortunately for her, Al was faster and had already drawn his sidearm, had already pulled the hammer, turned the safety off, had chambered a round, and had already set the toad at his sights by the time that the Senior Undersecretary had removed her wand from within her robes.

Al, however, was not the only one who had aimed their weapons. The forty seven other men that had accompanied Al had formed a firing line and, as one, they had their P-90's aimed at the toad. Harry imagined that Umbridge only had to twitch the wrong way before the men let loose with everything they had.

"Are you the toad that I am replacing?" Al suddenly asked.

The effect on Umbridge was exactly as Al had hoped. Having been informed that the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister had a temper but no skills to match, Al had resolved to get to her bad side as soon as possible.

The Battle Wizard had two purposes in doing this, the first was to show to the assembled Hogwarts staff that he was a much better

alternative to the toad, and second, to show to the toad that she was nothing more but a bully who cannot even back up her claims.

"I am the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, you insolent mudblood, I would not have you insulting me" Umbridge replied.

A shocked silence followed the statement of the Senior Undersecretary, with the many students of Hogwarts looking at her, a few openly expressing their shock at her for using the tabooed word. Al, however, merely looked at her and sighed.

The battle wizard used his peripheral vision and caught sight of the two youngest Weasleys, both of whom cringed when they realized that Al had set his gaze upon them, though Ginny cringed more.

The reaction of the youngest and only Weasley female actually brought a smile to Al's face, though he quickly wiped off this smile as he looked at Umbridge, "Why doesn't anybody realize that I am a pureblood who can trace his bloodline back to the time of Merlin?" he asked, it was obviously a rhetorical question since he did not wait for anyone to answer this.

Even if he had waited for someone, however, there would still be no answer.

Al then stared at Umbridge, the power behind his eyes visible for all to see as they actually flared around him, and said, "As the Weasley family has recently learned, the insult that you had perpetrated upon my person would be more than enough for me to claim your life, or anything else for that matter" he made a show of looking at her before he continued in a disgusted tone, "You have nothing I want, at least the youngest Weasley is attractive, you, on the other hand, well, let's just leave it at that".

Umbridge was speechless, because even a toad like her knew when she was being confronted by someone who was far more powerful than her. After Al had spoken, however, the toad-witch was back in the game.

"How dare you!" the senior undersecretary said.

"I would dare whenever I want" Al replied, he again fixed the toad his powerful gaze, and this time, Umbridge visibly faltered, "I would,

however, give you a chance to prove me wrong, duel me here and now in front of all these witnesses, and if you can even land a curse at me, then I would gladly step away from the castle".

That was the proper incentive, and soon, Dolores Umbridge was falling over herself in an attempt to accept the proposal.

While all the attention was focused on Al, Harry used the momentary shifting of attention from him to cast a quick glance at the Headmaster, and the Duke of Gryffindor confirmed that the Headmaster was actually rooting out for Umbridge, though Harry supposed that that was to be expected since Dumbledore would not want Al, or any of his men, inside the castle.

Five minutes later, Dolores Umbridge and Alvin York were facing each other in a dueling arena that was conjured in the middle of the pitch. Between the two of them, there was a ten feet distance, which was the maximum range of most spells.

"The rules of this duel are as follows" Professor Dumbledore, acting as the adjudicator, said, "The duel ends when one of the participants is down, has surrendered, or is otherwise incapacitated. Neither serious dark spells with the aim to seriously harm the other party, nor unforgivables, are allowed."

Al acknowledged the rules with a slight inclination of his head towards the Headmaster, though his attention never left the witch in front of him. The more experienced wizard knew that he could easily win this duel, he could even do it without having to pull out his wand.

For her part, Umbridge knew that she was screwed. In her mind, she knew that she could win a duel if it was against a half-blood or a muggle-born, but having been informed that the wizard that she is now facing is not only a pureblood, but also a pureblood who can trace his blood to the great Merlin, she knew she was screwed.

She needed an equalizer.

"The duel begins at the count of three, one....two...."

And the equalizer that she chose was to jump the count. Umbridge leveled her wand and sent two quick stunners towards her adversary. She was hoping that the stunners would end the duel

even before it began, but she seriously miscalculated the background of one Alvin York.

"You may be a great toad, having mastered reverse animagus transformation, but I guess that you still do not know how to count" Al said as he easily evaded both stunner using deft footwork.

For the next few moments, the entire assembled crowd was stunned as Al easily evaded every single stunner that the Senior Undersecretary was sending him, until Harry broke the silence by asking Al, "What are you doing Al?"

"Forgive me, Your Grace" Al replied as he continued to evade the spells being sent against him, "The headmaster said that the duel should start after he counts to three, unless I miss my guess, he still hasn't said so".

Harry and Hermione looked knowingly at one another and smiled, though in the case of Harry, the smile came with a rolling of his eyes as he wordlessly conveyed to his wife that Al was showing off.

Dumbledore, having been pressured by Flitwick and McGonagall, finally said "Three" and the duel was over even before the headmaster had closed his mouth.

Upon hearing the number that was to signal the start of the duel, Al sent eleven stunners straight at Umbridge, only, he did not use his wand, and not one of the stunners came from his direction, rather, they dropped down from the skies like lightning bolts.

Umbridge managed to evade a great many of them, but that was all according to the plan of Al. Since she was busy evading said lightning bolts, she did not notice it, and indeed, no one did, when the lightning bolts of stunners confined her to a small space.

Once she was confined to said space, the eleventh and final lightning bolt struck true, taking down the toad. From the time that the headmaster had pronounced the final number to the taking down of Umbridge, barely five seconds had passed.

Slowly, the cheering started. Most of the audience was still too stunned by the implied declaration of Al that he would not fire unless the duel has officially started, so they were taken aback when they

realized that the duel had already ended. The applause was certainly louder than the one that Umbridge had received after her welcoming remarks to the students though.

Al jumped down from the dueling arena, leaving his stunned opponent behind. With a pleasant smile on his face, he walked over to the Headmaster and asked, "I trust that that is a good enough job interview?"

Not many people could claim that they have ever seen Albus Dumbledore shocked. In the more than one hundred years that Albus Dumbledore had been alive, there was perhaps less than two dozen of them, but after the duel between Al and Umbridge, however, close to a thousand students and professors could now claim to be in that number.

"Excellently done, Mr. York" Professor McGonagall commented loudly, she turned towards her now former colleague and said, "I am sure that even the Ministry would not endorse a failure like Dolores Umbridge now that we have a much more qualified person to teach DADA".

Al allowed himself a smile as he made a show of looking at the assembled crowd before him, most of whom were still applauding his victory, and then he turned his gaze back towards Professor McGonagall, and his tone of voice took a more serious tone, "While I am more than honored to accept the DADA professor position, Professor, I am afraid that the first reason that I am at Hogwarts should take priority".

"I concur" Dumbledore suddenly said. The Headmaster was aware that the students were going to support Al, so he hastily added, "I think that we should have this conversation in my office".

"Much obliged, Headmaster" Al replied with a smile.

A few minutes later found Harry, Hermione, the rest of the Hogwarts senior staff, Al, and a member of his entourage that Harry recognized as his nominal aide, a German by the name of Hans Reingroffer, found themselves sequestered from the rest of the school inside the Headmaster's office.

Al had left four of his men to the front entrance of the office to better secure the facility, while two more were positioned just outside the door to the office proper. The rest of the contingent was already at work setting up their camp, for Al had pointedly refused to have his men bedded in the castle. His excuse of 'it might set off the students' was accepted by everyone, though Harry and Hermione recognized that this was a coded message that basically stated that Al wanted his men close to the back-up team of Hector at the bottom of the Black Lake.

Needless to say, Dumbledore was pleased that Al had insisted on having his men outside, the Headmaster thought that that would allow him to continue with his plans without interruption.

The Headmaster was not happy with the arrival of Alvin York and his men, he was far from pleased by their method of arrival, and he was irritated that Alvin York was now the DADA professor, but he was willing to take all of that in stride if he could separate Harry from his obviously protective bodyguards.

"Tell me where you intend to set up your camp, Professor York" Dumbledore said as soon as Al had made it clear that he and his men were building a camp.

"Near Greenhouse Eleven, which we have requisitioned" Al replied easily. The battle wizard noted the shocked expression on the face of Dumbledore and Professor Sprout, though the shocked expression on the face of the Herbology Professor was quickly cleared when she realized that no one had used said greenhouse for years.

Al nodded and continued when no one thought to interrupt him, "We are transforming Greenhouse Eleven into an exercise facility of sorts" he attempted to explain, he smiled as he added, "Most of my men are more intimate with their rifles and sidearm than with their wands, and a great many of my men that I left behind at headquarters are non-magical" he smiled, "I intend to turn said greenhouse into an indoor firing range and a dueling arena for wizard duels"

"Surely the sounds of the guns firing would wake the children and disturb our classes" Dumbledore attempted to comment, he looked at Al and said, "I cannot allow this".

Al actually smiled, "It actually does not matter whether or not you allow it to happen, Headmaster" he replied, he inclined his head towards Harry, "The Duke of Gryffindor" and then he inclined his head towards Hermione, "and his spouse, have already given their provisional nod of the head, the conversion has already began"

"This is an outrage, this is not a military facility, this is a school" Dumbledore replied.

"And you are either an idiot or have chosen to ignore realities, which would still make you an idiot" Al replied, shocking everyone in the room. Now that the attention of everyone was on him, he continued, "Hogwarts is a castle, and we are at war, this might not be a military facility right now, but if I have to bring in a division of engineers and soldiers to turn it into one, that is what I would do" he looked at Harry, who nodded.

Realizing that he would be outmaneuvered anyway, Dumbledore finally surrendered the fight. He was, however, not yet out of the war.

"I have no objections over you being the DADA professor" he continued, "but I cannot have you as head of Harry's bodyguards at the same time, this would reek of favoritism".

Al again laughed, "This worries you because...?" he began.

"Students would cry 'unfair' at the top of their lungs" Dumbledore replied. He actually sounded shocked that the battle wizard in front of him did not make the connection.

Al laughed, he glanced at a seriously angry Snape, who somehow had managed to keep his tongue inside his mouth, and then laughed again before turning his attention back towards Dumbledore, "Headmaster" he began, he controlled himself and then sighed, "The best way is to announce to the student population that I am biased when it comes to Lord Harry, Lady Hermione and their friends" he smiled, "It is actually a good thing that they are the only ones that I am biased for, unlike a certain someone who is biased for an entire house".

Snape attempted to reach for his wand, but before he could do so, he suddenly found himself staring at the business end of two SiG-

Sauer P226 9mm. Handguns, one held by Al and the other by his aide, "Do not think" Al began, his voice had strangely taken a more dangerous tone, "that I am unaware of the part that you played in the fall of Voldemort, do not think that I am unaware of the part that you played in the sacrifice of Lord James and Lady Lily".

Snape stared at the younger man in front of him, the potions master clearly wanted to grab his wand and blast Al into oblivion, but the combined factors of being face-to-face, literally, with a handgun, and the obvious power that was being reflected in the glowing eyes of Al had effectively neutered the Potions Master.

Snape continued to glare towards Al, but he eventually sat down. Al and his aide kept their sidearm pointed at him for a few moments after he sat down, but then returned them to their shoulder holsters a few moments later.

"As I was saying, Headmaster" Al continued, he again turned his attention towards Dumbledore, "I have no intention of hiding my blatant favoritism" he sighed and added, "Given the wording of the prophecy that your Divination Professor has given you that night fifteen years ago, I would have expected that a little favoritism may be in order".

Harry and Hermione watched as their Headmaster visibly paled as he realized that Harry was now aware of the prophecy. The aged Headmaster of Hogwarts mentally cursed himself for letting his guard down, but at that moment, there was nothing that he could do, he would have to retreat for now and try to find the best way to get Harry back into his fold.

"As such" Al continued, this time, he turned towards the Deputy Headmistress and the Head of Gryffindor House, "Lord Harry, Lady Hermione, and anyone else that they deemed worthy, would be joining me and my men for morning exercises, and I have promised your father, my Lady" at this, he inclined his head towards Hermione, "that you would at least be capable of holding a FAL when you go home for the Yule holidays".

"How come she gets to use a rifle?" Harry mocked complained.

"Well," Al replied with a smile, "Don't worry, I'll get you a Minimi to play with, maybe even give you one of those big mini-guns aboard one of the Puma's if you want".

Harry smiled, "I'll hold you onto that Al" he replied.

Al turned his attention back towards the Headmaster, "One last thing, Headmaster" he said, "A strip of land near the Black Lake would also be taken over by my men, we need it to construct our make-shift airstrip," he smiled, "You do realize that those helicopters cannot stay in the air forever right?"

Dumbledore merely nodded, aware that he would not be able to object even if he wanted to, though the next part of Al's demands had seriously made the Headmaster think if he should object, "In addition to the airstrip, we are also going to build a secure facility to store petroleum and our more dangerous weaponry, like the TOW missiles on the Lynx, the Stingers and the Hellfire's"

Dumbledore blinked, he had no idea what a TOW missile was, or what a Stinger or a Hellfire was, but he knew that whatever they are, they would not bode well for him and his plans.

EIGHTEEN

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

The embarrassment that Umbridge had suffered in the hands of Al York and Professor Flitwick was bound to have some effect, and three days after the defeat of the toad woman in the hands of Al York, such an effect materialized.

It was in the form of a squad of Aurors who were dispatched by the Minister for Magic to Hogwarts with the intention of arresting Al York for 'assaulting a Ministry Employee'. Unfortunately for the Ministry, Al was not only prepared, so were his men.

The moment that the Auror squad, composed of ten men, appeared in Hogmeade, they found themselves staring at the business end of three 20mm. cannons mounted on the doors of three Puma helicopters, four TOW missile launchers mounted on wing subs of one of the Lynx helicopters, and the end of the barrels of P-90 sub-machineguns and Minimi general purpose machineguns held by Al's men.

Rather than risk getting themselves blown up, the leader of the Aurors, Kingsley Shacklebolt, decided to negotiate, which was Al's plan from the very start.

Al, who had taken over the office of Umbridge as he was the new Defense Professor, presented Shacklebolt with his memories of inspecting the said office. Al had found at least three blood quills in the said office and possession of one, Al reminded Shacklebolt, was worth at least fifteen years in Azkaban.

That, of course, was not the most damning evidence. Al had somehow found evidence of communication between Umbridge and the Warden at Azkaban. It was the 'smoking gun', and it was enough to ensure that the Warden in Azkaban would have a new position in the island, that of a prisoner.

Umbridge herself was charged with attempted murder, as well as several other criminal, civil, and administrative charges. Suffice to

say, she would never walk out of prison on her own, most likely, she would never walk out of prison breathing.

Fudge seemed to have taken that into consideration when he decided not to pursue with his plan to have Al arrested. He was already reeling back after being hit by one scandal after another, and the Minister for Magic realized that the last thing that he needed right now was another scandal that had the potential to see him unseated from his position.

Without that interference of the Minister, Al was retained as the DADA Professor, and two days after his first class, the students were already raining praises upon him.

That was the primary reason why the fifth year Gryffindors, with the exception of one red-headed youngster, was looking forward to having his class. Unfortunately, since the class already had defense before Umbridge was kicked out, literally, they had to wait until the beginning of the new week before they can have their wishes fulfilled.

That did not matter to Harry, Hermione, and Neville. The three of them had joined Al and the rest of the men during their morning workout session and were present during most of the briefings that Al had conducted for his men, though the three would be the first to admit that they would also like to be in a DADA class being taught by a man who had spent many years of his life practicing practical defense.

That was the reason why the Defense classroom was full of students even before the bell signaling the first class of the day rang. No one, not even the Slytherins, wanted to be late for what was promised to be the most exciting class in the entire castle.

Harry and Hermione had taken the first two seats to the rear. Neville seated himself beside Hermione, making sure that Ron would have no place to seat. The decision to seat at the back of the class was also influenced by this desire to leave Ron away from Hermione.

The moment that the class bell rang, Al entered the room. Unlike most of the professors in Hogwarts, Al had refused to wear robes, instead, he was still wearing his battle dress, though this time, the

boonie hat was nowhere near his person. A quick glance towards his hip saw that he was also still wearing his sidearm, and Harry was certain that Al had his reserve hidden at his ankle holster.

Harry stifled a chuckle as he realized that even if Al was going to be teaching them magic, the battle wizard was not going to concede that magic was better than mundane defense.

Al looked at his class for a few moments, noted that seating arrangement that Duke and Duchess Gryffindor had taken, and then subtly nodded his approval towards Harry.

Al sighed, "Right" he began, "Welcome to your fifth year Defense Against the Dark Arts Class, my name is Alvin Charles York" he looked at the eyes of the students and added, "I hold a mastery with defense, transfiguration, charms and was working on my potions mastery when I was pulled into teaching you guys".

Harry glanced at Hermione, silently asking his wife if she knew that their chief bodyguard had earned three masteries, but she shook her head, indicating that she was not aware of this. Harry nodded once and turned his attention back towards Al, who smiled towards him as if he were telling Harry that he was also entitled to his secrets.

"The Dark Arts" Al began, his tone of voice taking a lecturing tone that Harry and Hermione, and to a lesser extent, Neville, knew very well, "Who can tell me what the Dark Arts are?"

A hand was raised and Al acknowledged the hand. A few moments later, Slytherin fifth year Pansy Parkinson stood up and recited, "The Dark Arts is the branch of magic that deals specifically with the intent of harming someone else".

Al smiled, "Five points to Slytherin for your answer, Miss Parkinson" Al replied, and then motioned for the Slytherin to sit down, before he turned his attention back to class, "While Miss Parkinson's definition of the Dark Arts may be correct, I am sorry to say that that is not the Dark Arts" he looked around for a few minutes, hoping against hope that someone else would raise their hands to show their opinion.

After a few moments, no one was brave enough to raise their hand, so Al continued, "The Dark Arts is not the branch of magic that deals specifically with the intent of harming someone else, for if that were

the definition of the dark arts, then a simple Diffindo would be a dark spell and the Avada Kedavra curse could actually be a light spell".

"What bullshit is that?" Ron asked.

Al turned his attention towards the red head and his lips curled into a humorless smile, "Ten points from Gryffindor and a week's detention with your head of house, Mister Weasley" he said. He turned his attention back towards his class, "The simple cutting spell, Diffindo, can be used to harm a person, does that make it a Dark spell?" he asked rhetorically, "In the same vein, the killing curse can be used to separate the soul of a dying person who refused to leave this world behind so that said person may no longer suffer, does that make it a light spell?"

"The answer, ladies and gentlemen, is that the Dark Arts is nothing more but a misnomer that someone came up with in order to divide magic into Light and Dark" Al continued, "When you leave the hallowed walls of this castle, you would realize that the world is not divided into the Dark and the Light, you would probably come to realize that in the real world, dark and light does not exist, the world, my young friends, is divided into shades of grey, not dark, not light. What makes a spell dark is not the spell itself; rather, it is the intent of the caster".

"Taking this into consideration, my young friends" Al continued, "It would be my job this year to teach you not only how to defend yourself against the so-called dark spells, but to defend yourselves against magic in general".

"Mister Goyle" Al suddenly called, making the named student jump to his feet, "Tell me, what is the best way to defend yourself against an incoming spell?"

"A shield charm, sir?" Goyle tried.

Al smiled, "Is that your answer, Mister Goyle, or are you asking me?" he asked.

"My answer, sir" Goyle replied.

Al smiled, "I would have given you ten points, Mister Goyle, next time, when you answer, you should mean it and you should be

confident in your answer," Al said, "Five points to Slytherin because you answered, at least" he turned his attention towards the class, "Do you agree with this Mister Thomas?"

Dean shot to his feet, "I think so, sir" he replied, and when Al did not say anything else, Dean followed up, "I mean, sir, the shield charm is the primary defense spell taught to students".

"Take five points, Mister Thomas" Al replied, "Unfortunately, your answer is wrong" he turned to the class, "How many of you believe that you can shield against my stunner?" he asked. Al was only expecting two hands, maybe three, so he was surprised when he saw Blaise Zabini and Ronald Weasley raised their hands.

Al nodded, "For all of you who raised your hands, take five points for your confidence" he replied, "And all of you stand up and cast your shield charm please"

Harry, Hermione, Neville, and the two other boys all stood up and did as asked. Al rippled fire a stunner against all of them. Harry and Hermione, as expected, took it into stride, their shield did not falter. Neville's faltered a bit, but he remained otherwise unharmed.

Ron and Blaise caught the stunner. The red jet of light pierced through their shield charms as if said shield charms are not even there. A quick enervate later, the two stunned students were back on their feet and sat down.

"There are some spells that not even the most powerful shield charm can shield against" Al said, "Duke and Duchess Gryffindor and, to a lesser extent, Lord Longbottom, managed to negate my stunner because the shield charm is a magical core based spell, and their magical cores are extremely powerful, though I doubt that their shield charms can defend against my reductor curse, or a banishing charm for that matter, because both work using the laws of physics, after all" he turned towards Ron and Blaise, "Mister Weasley and Mister Zabini failed to defend against my stunner because their core was overpowered by the power in my spell" he looked at the class, "Be warned, there is always someone out there who is more powerful than you".

"Sir" Parvati said, tentatively, she raised her hand, and when Al acknowledged her, she continued, "What is the best way to defend then?"

Al smiled, "Do not be there in the first place" he replied simply, when he saw the incredulous look in the eyes of his students, his grin widened as he continued, "Spells are linear, you all know that, they do not bend corners, they do not evade, they do not do homing, unlike my toys at the camp which do all that" he paused for a few moments, "Say I fire a stunner at you, Miss Patil, do you think that you can evade it?"

"Maybe, sir" Parvati replied.

Al smiled, "Five points for your confidence Miss Patil, though next time, do say it with more conviction" he said, he turned toward his class, "She is right, anyone can evade my stunner, and anyone can evade anyone's stunner, in other words...." He trailed off, hoping someone would continue for him.

"Do not be there in the first place" Hermione answered, she smiled at Al.

"Ten points, my Lady Duchess" Al replied, inclining his head slightly towards her, "Do not be there in the first place" he smiled and addressed his class, "We are going to learn some basic evasion, some spells that usually come up with your OWL's, and then I'd like to introduce you lot to basic dueling, though I might ask Professor Flitwick to help me with that one." he sighed, "For now, everyone stand up, partner with someone and then try to hit each other with the jelly legs curse while evading".

Parkinson Lodge

Dover

Remus Lupin passively observed as the members of his fifteen man reconnaissance team set about their equipment. Although the former defense professor had no idea what the hell those heavy and dangerous looking things that his men brought were, he had an idea of what they were capable of, he had been briefed on them after all.

Remus and his men stationed themselves atop a ridge overlooking a rather huge mansion. The mansion was the only building in sight for many kilometers around it, almost as if the owner of the mansion wanted privacy, and Remus knew that that was exactly the case why Parkinson lodge was built here, because the Parkinson family wanted their privacy.

Of course, the reason that they wanted said privacy had nothing to do with their solitary life, for the members of that family were not of the solitary type, rather, the reason that they wanted privacy was so that the screams of their victims would not carry out of their territory.

It worked for them, since the screams of their victims were never heard, nor were they ever charged. Unfortunately for them, their relative isolation worked two ways. There was no way that the fire services brigade, or anyone else for that matter, would hear the sounds of the explosion that two Royal Air Force Harrier jump jets, courtesy of the Royal Air Force, were about to deliver to the address.

Special Reconnaissance Service had confirmed that there were several targets in the building, and rather than risk casualties by storming the building, they recommended using a technological advantage that the Death Eaters were not aware of, much less had something to counter it.

Remus turned his attention towards the spotter of his team, just in time to watch the man aim his binoculars towards the target, Parkinson Lodge. Beside the spotter, there was another man who was also looking through his own binoculars, the reserve spotter whose equipment would take over in case the primary failed, though that was doubtful.

Another man also had his attention towards the building. This man also had his binoculars pointed at the lodge, but Remus knew that the binoculars that he was using were ordinary ones, not the infra-red binoculars that would guide the bombs that were now being readied.

Remus turned his attention towards the target area; he brought his own binoculars, secured around his neck by a lace, to his eyes so that he may also look at the target. The Death Eaters, Remus saw, had posted outer sentries, but the sentries were complacent and believed themselves to be alone.

Remus had to concede though, that from the point of view of the sentries, they were alone. The team that Remus as leading was too far away, from their point of view. Just because that was true for them, however, did not mean that it was true for Remus and his team.

"Sir" the leader of the Special Reconnaissance Service lent to Remus for this mission, approached Remus and said, "We are ready to call in the rain".

Remus nodded, "Remind me again of the ordinance that the pilots are going to deliver, Captain" he said.

The captain seemed to smile as he answered the question that was posed to him, "Two Harrier jets, both armed with two one thousand pound laser guided bombs" he replied, "Just in case that is not enough, two more Harriers, armed at the same way, are standing by".

Remus nodded, "More than enough" he said, and at the same time, he hoped.

The werewolf was not worried about what would happen should the bombs miss their targets. The laser guiding equipment that they have deployed would make such a possibility unlikely, and in case the wards prevented the bombs from coming in, which was doubtful, and the Death Eaters attack their position, Remus was sure that they, the Death Eaters, would be cut down by accurate sniper fire from the members of the SRS.

"Bring in the rain" Remus replied. A few moments later, the captain relayed the order. There was no sound for quite a few minutes, and then, there was a loud noise that reminded Remus of the Hogwarts Express for a brief few moments.

Remus kept his eyes glued on the target area, however, so he witnessed first-hand the effect of four one thousand pound bombs being dropped from the air. Within ten seconds, Parkinson Lodge had been transformed to a burning scrap heap where no survivors would be expected.

"How long before that fire goes down, Captain?" Remus asked, he lowered his binoculars and turned his attention towards the leader of the SRS, who had also lowered his binoculars.

"An hour or more sir" the captain replied, and then he nodded, "Once the fire dies down sir, we can move a section there to check for survivors".

Remus shook his head, "There are no survivors of this attack captain, unfortunately" he smiled, "Have your snipers keep watch and have them make sure that there are no survivors" he sighed, "When the fire dies down, we would go down there and make sure ourselves".

The SRS captain looked at this man, whom he had been told was a personal agent of Her Majesty, and then nodded. The orders that he had given might seem a bit harsh, but then the captain reminded himself that the targets were terrorist who did not care who it was that they took out.

10 Downing Street

London, England

Cornelius Fudge swept out of the Floo Connection between his office and the office of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, expecting the Prime Minister to be waiting for him alone.

The Minister for Magic, therefore, was surprised when he saw that with the Muggle Prime Minister were two men, one of whom, he recognized.

"Black?" Fudge asked.

Sirius Black knew that the Minister for Magic did not like him. Fudge may have been the one who signed his release papers, but that actually made the small petty man hate Sirius all the more.

"Welcome to 10 Downing, Minister Fudge" the other man said, "I am Minister Paul Orson, the Home Secretary" he motioned towards Sirius, "And you know Sirius Black, our newly appointed attaché to your office?"

Fudge nodded, he was not aware of the new appointment, of course, but decided to ignore it, "I am a busy man, Minister" Fudge said towards the Prime Minister, "Was there something that you wanted to talk with me about?"

The Prime Minister nodded, he looked at Fudge once and then nodded again, "As you are a busy man, Minister" the Prime Minister said, "I would go straight to the point" he looked hard at Fudge for a few moments, and then said, "I am worried about the magical government that you lead, Minister".

Fudge was taken aback, "I can assure you, sir" Fudge replied, "that no matter what the international press is saying, my government is on the right track".

The Prime Minister nodded, and then asked, "I take it that you are close personal friends with Lucius Malfoy?"

Fudge nodded and smiled, "An old friend of mine, sir" he replied, unaware of what really happened to the man, "Gave generous donations to many noble ends, that man did, and I am honored to call him a friend" he looked towards the Home Secretary and blinked when he realized that the Home secretary was glaring at him.

Fudge, however, never had the time to ask why the Home Secretary was glaring at him because the Prime Minister said, "Your honored friend, as you called him, Minister" he began, "was placed under arrest by London Metropolitan Police two weeks ago, since then, his name has come up with several thousands of cases, including horrific number of rapes and murder that would actually make the crisis in Bosnia look tame".

Fudge blinked, "He is a member of our Wizengamot" he replied, "According to the treaty, he cannot be arrested by the Muggle Government, only our government can try him".

"Try me, Fudge" the home secretary replied, practically shouting at the Minister for Magic, "Your friend is no longer in the United Kingdom, he has been taken by the US Military to Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba, where he will stay until we can find out where his permanent destination will be" he glared at Fudge, "And as for diplomatic immunity, it does not count."

"Half of Europe and the United States wants his head on a pike, Fudge" the Prime Minister replied, "Within days of being identified, the Foreign Office have received extradition requests from the United States, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Benelux, and Ireland, damn it, even the Swiss wants his head on a pike, and the only country in West Europe who does not want him is the Vatican, and that is tentative as we have been informed that the Swiss Guards are checking up on unsolved crimes that might involve him".

"Brazil have also filed an extradition request, as have Argentina, and several other counties in South America" the Home Secretary continued, "your friend will stay in Gautanamo Naval Base for a long time, Minister, as the different governments involved in this would take decades, at least, to sort this one out".

"This had us concerned, Fudge" the Prime Minister said, "You practically admitted to us that the man bribed you and this made us wonder how many more Malfoy's there are in your government".

"We will find out at once!" Fudge promised.

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary both smirked, "And your search would last a week and turn up with nothing, and we would have another crisis like this in our hands after a few months, no" the Prime Minister said, he shook his head for emphasis, and then he motioned towards Sirius, "Lord Sirius Black, Earl of Blackmoor, would be the agent of Her Majesty's government in dealing with this problem".

"But Black...." Fudge began.

"Earl Black had been cleared by your government" the Home Secretary replied, "Because of the miscarriage of justice committed by your government and the government of your predecessor, he languished in jail for a crime that he did not commit for thirteen years and have been running for the past two, this ends now".

"Earl Black will be tasked with investigating all members of the Ministry for anyone else like Malfoy" the Prime Minister replied, "His title would be 'Imperial Steward' and will report to myself and to the Lord President of Her Majesty's Privy Council from this moment on".

Fudge nodded, he was aware that there was no way that he could fight this right now. The Minister for Magic decided in that moment that he would fight against Black once Black was in the Ministry, since Fudge knew that he would always win there.

"The Imperial Steward already selected the members of his team that will help him with this investigation" the Prime Minister continued.

"Arthur Weasley, late of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, Amelia Bones, the Head of the Department for Magical Law Enforcement, Broderick Bode, member of the Department of Mysteries, and Amos Diggory of the Department of Magical Creatures Regulation Office" Sirius said.

Fudge nodded, he paled considerably as he realized that every name that Sirius had given him were his enemies in the ministry. Weasley, whom he had removed from the Ministry right after he glowed pink, Bones, who wanted Fudge's ass since he was not doing anything, Bode, who appeared neutral, but was not Fudge's friend as well, and Diggory, who still wanted justice for his son.

Fudge sighed, although it was barely audible when he realized that he was in for a tough fight.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Most of the students were inside the Great Hall when it happened, but there were still quite a few who were on their way from their classes.

The fifth year Gryffindor students were one group that was outside the Hall, as were the fifth year Slytherin students.

As these two groups were entering the Great Hall, an unusual noise was heard. The students paused; they tried to identify the noise, and it was only this unexpected pause that saved many of them from falling head first into a swamp that suddenly appeared in front of the entrance to the Great Hall.

"What the hell?" Dean Thomas asked.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, they silently asked one another if this was a Hogwarts trick, but Hermione shook her head at the unasked question of her husband when she realized that this could not be the work of the castle.

That left only one culprit, or rather, only two culprits.

The Duke and Duchess looked towards their table and sent their small smiles towards the pranking twins.

"This would get Molly out of that house, alright" Harry whispered to Hermione, who nodded, and then started to laugh, along with the rest of her housemates, when Vincent Crabbe fell into the swamp.

A few moments later, the laughter turned into screams of terror when they realized that there was something alive in the swamp. Harry and Hermione turned their gaze towards the waters, and their eyes widened when they saw the outline of at least three alligators making their way towards the trashing boy.

Harry and Hermione drew their wands, but they barely had time to point them when they heard a sharp sound coming from the direction of the staff table. Most of Hogwarts, unfamiliar with that sound, turned their attention towards the staff table, only to see Al standing on top of the table with his sidearm out of his holster and smoke coming out of the barrel of the said weapon.

Apparently, one of the alligators had been hit, and for some reason, the two other alligators decided not to pursue the rather chubby Slytherin who was trashing about in the water.

"Who is responsible for this?" Severus Snape asked.

Without shame, the Weasley twins stood up, "We did it" Fred (or was it George?) said. Neither twin wore guilty expressions on their faces, on the contrary, they looked as if they enjoyed it.

Snape was fuming, steam was actually coming out of his head, "Detention" he announced, "And I shall be speaking with your parents about this, make no mistake".

The twins merely smiled and nodded, which infuriated Snape more. With all the attention on the three, no one noticed when Al smirked as well. His left hand casually moved to his pocket and he pressed a button that sent a signal to the men that he had handpicked for the raid at the Burrow. They were on.

NINETEEN

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Harry watched as Fred and George – seated beside him inside the command tent that his men had set up in the grounds near the lake – shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

If he had to guess, Harry would say that the reason that the Weasley twins were uncomfortable was because of the fact that they had thought about using their portable swamp – the one that they had used on the Great Hall – against the bodyguards.

Harry was sure that the twins were now thanking whatever deities there were that they had the presence of mind not to prank these men.

Hermione was also thinking along the same lines as her husband. She knew that Fred and George had watched for an hour as a squad from the company had worked on the marksmanship skills with their FAL rifles – she noted that the twins took careful consideration of the damage and the range of the said rifles – and she also knew that the twins had asked one of the ground mechanics attached to the company about the missiles in the attack helicopters.

Shaking her head violently, Hermione wished that the twins would not take inspiration from the explosive power of the missiles that had been brought along and attempt to recreate their own magical version; she was already having enough trouble with their relatively smaller prank gadgets.

Harry noted his wife shaking her head, and he looked at her with a raised eyebrow. She smiled at him, and a silent communication passed between the two of them before Harry nodded and turned his attention back towards the Weasley twins.

In a way, they are the reason that we are here today, Harry thought to himself.

His mind flashed back to the night of the raid, two days ago. Al had personally vetoed any student – or men assigned at Hogwarts –from participating with the said raid. The commander of the Potter Family Bodyguards – that was the nickname that the students of Hogwarts had given them – was adamant on that.

Harry, Hermione, Neville and Luna all understood the reason for that– they could afford to be involved in such a raid because they might be injured and the headmaster would notice that – but Fred and George had put up quite a struggle after they were told the same thing.

Al had to place them in detention with him for doing so.

Hermione turned to Harry to ask him about something, but before she could do so, Al entered the command tent – he was carrying a binder under his arms and wearing his now trademark battle dress – followed by two other people, one of them, a woman.

"Right" Al said as he took the center stage. He positioned the binder that he was holding on the podium in front of him, and then he allowed his eyes to gaze upon the assembled people before him, "We are here today to review the results of Operation Sitting Duck and Operation Errant Runner".

Harry nodded, aware that the former was the air strike operation against Parkinson Lodge while the latter was the raid on the Burrow. He smiled as he realized that Al and his people were very, very busy.

"First off, we have Operation Sitting Duck" Al said, he opened the binder and started to read from what could have been the after action report of said operation, though he read it in such a way that it might have been boring for him, "Mission was successful with unknown number of Death Eaters killed, possibly more than a dozen." Al said, he yawned – yeah, Harry decided, it's boring for him – "Group commander in charge of the group that took out Parkinson Lodge reported that the destruction was total and that there was no way that they could be sure of the identities of the fatalities"

Hermione raised her hand and Al acknowledged her. The Duchess asked, "How can we be sure that we would have destroyed the Death Eaters entirely if we are not even sure if we have taken them all down?"

"Your Grace" Al said, smiling a bit as Harry noted that the Battle Wizard was no longer as bored as he was five seconds ago, "The Dark Mark of Voldemort" – only the Weasley twins cringed, and even then, not by much – "was a sort of way for him to siphon off power from his followers, when we kill him, all of his marked followers are going to go with him"

"That is the crucial word, though" Harry suddenly said, he looked at Al and added, "Marked." He paused for a few moments before he added, "We all know that there are some Death Eaters who are not marked, at most, some sympathizers. We need to deal with these blood bigots just as effectively as we should deal with Voldemort"

Al nodded, "Agreed" he conceded, he paused for a while as he thought about that, and then he added, "Unfortunately, for the time being, we would have to leave that to the Ministry"

"Sirius is supposed to be starting his new job today" Hermione commented, "Perhaps we would be seeing some changes in them soon"

"We can only hope" Al said, nodding his head in agreement, he paused for a few moments, allowing his eyes to lock gazes with some of the assembled people before him, waiting for anyone else to make his or her opinion known, before he said, "Now, we go to the more exciting operation, Operation Errant Runner"

Harry smiled when he noticed that the Weasley twins were now seating straighter, clearly, they wanted to know everything about the raid.

"Commander Irina Engels led that raid, and we have her here with us now" Al said, he gave way for the woman who was following him. Harry and Hermione noted that a smile passed between the two, but that was it.

Harry studied this relatively newcomer. She was about a head shorter than Al, with short medium blonde hair that might even be classified as brown. Her eyes were brown – the color of chocolates, Harry thought, just like Hermione's – and she had a taut body. Harry considered that if he was not head over heels with Hermione, he might have looked at this woman twice.

Hermione also studied this newcomer, but unlike her husband, she was also studying her interaction with Al York. It was clear that there was a relationship there, though from what Hermione could tell, it was probably a complicated one.

"Thank you, Al" Irina said, she looked at him and smiled again towards Al – they are on a first name basis, so there must be something there since everyone refers to Al as 'commander', Hermione thought –, before she turned his attention back to the assembled crowd, "I would not bore you with the details of the raid, suffice to say, it was a boring one, though if you are interested, I am sure that we have a pensieve in here somewhere, so I would go straight to what we found in the Burrow".

Irina breathed in before she started her report, "We found several potions in a hidden location in the kitchen" – that alone confirmed that it was Molly – "that are disturbing".

"What kind of potions are we talking about Irina?" Al asked.

"Impatient as always, Al" Irina replied, turning towards him with a suggestive smile on her face – Harry noted that Al returned the same suggestive smile – before she said, "Love potions, as suspected".

Al nodded. Harry turned towards Fred and George and noted that the expressions on the faces of the twins have turned dark, but Irina was not yet done, "We believe that it was a much more complex amortentia-type of potion, and our potions experts are working on it as we speak".

"We got to rescue dad now!" George shouted.

Al looked at the twins, and then sadly shook his head, "I know that you want him back, gentlemen, but if we are dealing with a love potion, then we best be careful" he looked at Irina and asked, "Do you think that it has become self-sufficient?"

"Almost certain" Irina replied with a sad tone. A huge scowl appeared on her face, "This long, and with seven children?" she asked rhetorically, "I would also say that he has become dependent

on it, we can take him out of it, I am sure, but it would be a long and tedious process"

Al nodded; he turned to the assembled people before him and noted the blank expression on the faces of the four younger Hogwarts students and the expressions of anger on the faces of the Weasley twins. He sighed and then said, "Fred, George, I know that you want to rescue your dad, I want to as well, he is a very well placed member of the Order, and I need not remind you that we have lost all of our contacts with the Order, but if the potion has become self-sufficient, we really need to plan this well".

"I have never came across that reference before Al" Hermione said, scowling a bit, though Al knew that it was just because she was disappointed that she had never came across it before.

Al nodded, he nodded once towards Irina, who moved away from the podium, allowing Al to return to it, before Al continued, "There is no magic in this world that is capable of making you fall in love with someone" he said, "Amortentia, or love potion, works, at best, as a sort of a diversion, diverting the affections that you have for someone else to someone else, like an irrigation canal."

"At worst" Al continued his lecture, "it is nothing more but a liquid imperious curse, mind control, deadly, and deserving of nothing less than death".

"Just as there is no magic that can make you fall in love with someone else, there is also nothing in this world that can make you fall out of love with someone" Al continued, "and I ask you, what is the greatest manifestation of the love that a man and woman share?"

The students – indeed, some of the adults in the room – looked blank at what he had just said. Then Hermione raised her hand and said, "Children".

Al smiled, "Five points to Gryffindor, Lady Hermione" he replied, and then he nodded, "Children".

"Seven of them" Irina said, she looked apologetic as she continued, "Yes, there might have been a love potion involved, but the crux of the matter remains that Arthur Weasley fathered seven children" she

looked at Harry and Hermione, "Any man and woman can conceive a child, yes, love need not be in the equation, but once that child comes into this world, he or she is loved by his or her parents unconditionally, no matter the defects, no matter the abnormalities, no matter their quirks, no matter where they came from" she smiled tragically, "or at least, any good parent should, and Arthur Weasley, from what little I know of him, is a good father"

"So basically" Hermione said, "Arthur has also developed feelings for Molly?"

Al nodded, "It was inevitable" he replied, "but for the sake of his children, he had to" he looked sad as he added to Fred and George, "you are not the reason that your father is in his predicament right now, you are innocent of all of these manipulations that your father has fallen into".

"You said you can save him?" George asked after a few moments of silence

Irina nodded, "We can" she replied, "We are not going to remove the affection that he has for your mother, we are merely going to tell him everything that has happened and hope that he will take it well" she smiled, again, tragically, as she added, "It's all up to him actually, though given the potions used, we will need time to brew an effective counter to it".

Fred and George nodded, "Should we tell Bill and Charlie?" George asked, he was clearly uncertain of what to do next.

"We will take care of that" Irina replied, she glanced at Al, who nodded, and then she added, "I best return to Potter Island to help my researchers" she bowed before Harry and Hermione, her right fist over her left chest, "It was a pleasure meeting you in person, my lord and lady, we will meet again"

Ministry of Magic

London, England

Sirius Black was mighty well pleased that the guard at the Ministry entrance knew as much about muggle weaponry as a chicken knows how to play a flute. Which was not really that much, Sirius

considered with a smile as he walked along the hallways of the Ministry towards his office.

As he remembered his confrontation with the ministry security guard at the desk beside the Atrium, Sirius thought about the story that Al had told them when he came here as Anton Rosseu just last month.

With a small smile, Sirius remembered that the Battle Wizard was able to smuggle not one, but five MP-5K sub-machineguns into what was supposed to be a secure facility in the whole of magical Britain. Of course, Al confirmed that same night – when only the adults were up– that he not only smuggled five sub-machineguns into the ministry, he was also carrying two miniature fuel-air bombs that had recently been developed by the US Air Force.

Quite simply, if Al thought that their position would have become unassailable that time, he was prepared to use force.

That was the reason why Sirius did not hesitate to accept the job that Her Majesty's Government had offered him. Aside from the fact that as a Black – a noble family that never signed the Magna Carta – he was answerable to the queen, Sirius was also looking for some payback towards those that had helped with his illegal incarceration.

Of course, Sirius knew that not everyone in the Ministry would view his presence with marshmallows and roses, the former Auror knew that most of the people in the Ministry would rather see him chucked back to Azkaban, despite his innocence being proclaimed.

That was the reason why Sirius asked Al for some help. Al was only all too willing to provide such assistance. Too much of it actually, Sirius thought darkly as he remembered Al assembling an entire company from the Potter family guards – all armed to the teeth with their firearms – for his inspection before informing Sirius that these men would be his bodyguards.

Sirius managed to placate Al by accepting only ten to be his bodyguards, and he would only have two close at hand, and those two were the men that were walking slightly behind him at either flank.

Both men were wearing dark suits, as was Sirius – he did not want to wear robes since he thought that that would be pandering to the

purebloods – but the two bodyguards were also wearing earpieces on their right ears that connected them, via radio, to the other eight men that were close by. Should ten men armed with MP-7 Personal Defense Weapons not be enough, there was a Metropolitan Police installation nearby, and thanks to the deals that Al apparently made with MI5, the Metropolitan Police had been asked to assist them.

Sirius finally reached his destination, which he knew from memory was some sort of a conference room. He had been informed that those whom he had requested to be in his overseer team were already waiting for him inside, so he quickly entered the room.

As he had expected, there were four people in the room, but only one woman. Normally, the rather narcissistic – in a good way – Black would have been disappointed at that ratio – I so do not want to compete with three other guys for the affection of a lady, we sexy pieces of flesh need to be generous sometimes – but he knew that this was not the time to be trying to pick up a woman. Sirius also knew that he was more liable to get himself hexed by Amelia.

Sirius greeted each one inside the room with a nod of his head before he took his position at an empty seat in the round table. Sirius had specifically requested – a politely worded demand, actually, given his position – that a round table be used. It would prove easier to facilitate the message that Her Majesty had personally requested Sirius to deliver.

"Welcome to our first meeting" Sirius said, inclining his head once more towards the members of his personal team, he got polite nods in return.

"As you know, this council has been requested by the Muggle Government because they are concerned about the apparent disturbing trends happening within our society" Sirius continued, "I want to be perfectly clear, gentlemen and lady, that though I am the one that Her Majesty has spoken to, this council was, is, and always will be composed of equals"

There were nods around the table, "Her Majesty has given me the go signal to handpick the members" Sirius admitted after a few moments, "and I have decided to share all of these responsibilities with you because I know of your convictions in seeing justice done, and your convictions in helping the ordinary witches and wizards".

Sirius turned to Arthur, the former Department Head looked as if he had not slept for a good number of days. Considering the situation that he found himself in – he was fired for something that was not his fault – Sirius was actually surprised that he was still holding himself together. Sirius had already received the report of the raiding team, and he had spoken with Al right after Al had given the brief.

In addition to being the nominal head of this council, Sirius was also tasked with assessing Arthur's current condition.

"We will be compensated for this Arthur" Sirius said, a thin smile graced his face, "Her Majesty is not one who asks her citizens to render free service"

Arthur nodded and smiled, though there seemed to be little enthusiasm in it, "Arthur, you will be in charge of looking into the incidents wherein the muggle and the magical world have collided" Sirius said, "As such, you will be talking to a lot of members from the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, the Obliviators, and the likes. Given your former position in the ministry, I felt that this was the best position for you" Sirius looked at Arthur, "Do you accept?"

Arthur nodded, "I do" he replied.

Sirius nodded, he turned to Amelia, who was seated next to Arthur, "Amelia, as Head of the DMLE, I felt that you should be in charge of looking into our internal security" he said, "We need to insure that there are no Death Eaters in the Ministry" Sirius looked every bit his namesake as he added, "it was the debacle with Malfoy that convinced Her Majesty to find a solution on her own".

Amelia nodded, "I will get on it as soon as possible" she replied.

"Broderick" Sirius continued, the Unspeakable was next in line, "We need your help in investigating magical artifacts and the likes that your office loves to play with" Sirius said, "Coordinate with Arthur if you have to, but we need to prevent them from interacting with the muggle world in an unsafe manner, meaning, we need to prevent them from interacting with the muggle world at all"

"I will do my best to live up to the expectations of Her Majesty, Earl Black" Bode replied with a nod. The senior unspeakable paused for

a few moments, and then said, "If I may, we have detected some unauthorized people near our office for some time and I would like to request anyone who would come across any information relevant to this to inform me" he said the last pointedly towards Arthur and Amos.

Sirius smiled thinly, it would appear that Broderick Bode was not an unspeakable for no apparent reason. The man was aware that Dumbledore and Voldemort had somehow developed an unhealthy obsession with his office.

"Finally, Amos" Sirius continued after promising Bode that he would tell him anything relevant to his request, "As the most competent administrator in all of us here, I would like to leave you with investigating the Executive Board of the Ministry," Sirius sighed before he added, "I know that you still want some form of justice for your son, and I assure you, we will deliver justice, but I need to know that you will not let your personal bias against Fudge color your work".

"It will be done" Amos promised, he nodded once towards Sirius.

"Good" Sirius said, "I will be in charge of investigating Azkaban" he said. Sirius saw the cringe that all four members of his team performed when he said that. It was generally believed that those who spent a considerable amount of time in the prison would not want to be anywhere within ten kilometers of it, but Sirius was volunteering on returning. He smiled as he added, "As the only person to ever escape from the prison, I felt that I am the only one who knows it like the back of my hand, besides" he added, "my visits to the prison will be few and far between, I am actually hoping to see the case files of the prisoners there"

Amelia nodded, "I see" she replied, "Her Majesty's Government must also be concerned about the apparent lack of trial that you suffered"

Sirius nodded, "Indeed" he replied with a smile, he sighed once and then said, "Now, we are a council of five" he continued, "As such, any important matters that we have to decide on would be put to the vote, as we are five, there would be no ties, unless one of us abstains, should that happen, the motion would not carry" he looked at the members of the council, "Are we agreed?"

Amelia looked at Sirius for a few moments, and then added a concern, "Would this not severely hamper our mandate to act with all haste?" she asked, "Voting on matters would take time"

"I agree with Amelia" Amos said, "Sometimes, time is of the essence, especially when we are going to arrest someone"

Sirius nodded, "Her Majesty's Government has expressed concerns in regard to this as well, and the Right Honorable Prime Minister suggested that all motions be given temporary effect for a period of two days before it goes up for vote" Sirius said, "In regards to arresting a person, we can legally detain a person for forty eight hours without any charges against them"

"True" Amelia conceded, inclining her head towards Sirius.

"I am worried about the press that this would attract" Arthur said, he looked at Sirius and said, "Surely the Daily Prophet would not allow us to do our job properly, considering that Fudge is in control of it"

Sirius smiled, "Do you remember Anton Rosseu?" he asked, and when everyone nodded their heads, Sirius added, "He has several friends in the International Media, one of them a reporter by name of Joseph Andrews from the Wizard Times who is coming in from the United States, along with several others from neighboring countries," Sirius smiled, "Fudge might own the Prophet, but most everyone outside Britain equates the Prophet as nothing more than propaganda, and while some of our people do read the fish wrap, Xeno Lovegood did report a rather substantial increase in subscriptions to the Quibler, and said magazine has always been known to print the truth, even if it gets stretched a bit"

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Severus Snape was angry, and when he was angry, his snakes knew better than to cross him. Unfortunately for them, the Potions Master was in their common room when he blew his top.

"I want volunteers" the Potions Master said, "I want volunteers to help me take on Al York"

With a wide smile at his face, Draco Malfoy – who had just very recently returned to school after an unexplained two week sabbatical– raised his hand. A few moments later, his two goons followed suit. Having been humiliated by what he assumed was Potter and his girlfriend, Blaise Zabini raised his hand a few moments later.

Half an hour later, half of the house, including several seventh year students, had raised their hands. Severus Snape smiled as he revealed his plan to his students, though he did scowl a bit when Goyle and Crabbe asked for him to repeat it.

In response, the Potions Master shouted his plan at the top of his lungs, he really did not need to, though, he just wanted to, he would later claim that it was to blow off some steam. Of course, the dragonfly camera that Hector had assigned to Snape permanently – it was following Snape twenty hours a day, even when the Potions Master was on the bathroom, though there were no one in the cameras during such eventualities, the ones watching felt the need to take baths themselves – did not need Snape to shout his plans.

It did help though, because now, Hector and his surveillance team were aware what the greasy-haired dungeon master was planning. Promptly warned, Hector sent the report to Al a few moments later, and then tried to decide if he would have a cheese or barbecue popcorn when he watched Snape's plan unfold the next day – wait, sour cream popcorn might be a good bet too.

TWENTY

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Harry knocked once on the door. The Duke, however, did not care to wait for anyone to answer him because right after he finished knocking, he entered the room.

He blinked when he saw that the room was nearly empty, and then he smiled that, of course, the room would be empty.

Early in the morning, Al had approached Harry and Hermione – who were having their breakfast – and asked for Harry to meet with him in his office. Harry would have brought Hermione with him – there was nothing that the two of them do not do together after all – but Al had asked the Duchess to meet with Francesca so that they would review her marksmanship skills.

Harry held a smile back after that. The Duke knew that Hermione was a better shot than him, and Harry guessed that that was because Hermione's father was with the Royal Navy. The Duke was not sure how much of her father's shooting skills his wife had inherited, but Harry was forced to concede that it was more than enough.

Harry remembered that Hermione had grudgingly accepted Al's offer to have Francesca – whom, Harry and Hermione had learned, had been assigned as Hermione's personal bodyguard – run her through a course. Of course, both Harry and Hermione knew that Francesca had been ordered by Al to do this, which practically told Harry and Hermione that whatever it was that Al wanted to talk with Harry about, it was something that Al was not sure if Hermione should be a part of.

Entering the office, Harry found it completely bare. Harry had been in the office of the DADA professor before, at least once for every person that had occupied this room with the exception of when Quirell occupied it – Harry doubted that anyone had been in the office then.

During the time of Lockhart, the room was covered with life size images of the fraud. That was the time when Harry hated the DADA office because he could not stand having one Lockhart looking at him, far less a dozen.

During Lupin's time, the office was an amazing place where you were very likely to come across a strange creature that the werewolf professor had procured for his classes.

During Moody's time – the fake one, that is – the classroom was filled with dark detectors. The man was paranoid about his safety, so that was understandable. In retrospect, Harry realized that he should have noticed that the Moody that occupied the office was fake when he learned that the man had destroyed his sneakoscope, but then again, the man had a point.

Now, it was empty. There was not even a desk or a cabinet in the office, only bare stone walls that seemed to convey loneliness. It was just as Harry had expected because he knew that Al was not staying at this place. The commander was staying with his men at the makeshift camp that they had erected near the Black Lake.

A flash of movement to his right caused Harry to throw himself to his left. Just as he threw himself, a sword slashed through the air, right where he was but a few moments ago.

Harry summoned the sword of Gryffindor and prepared to defend himself against his unknown assailant. Al walked out of the shadows, his own sword in his right hand and pointing obliquely towards the floor.

Harry smiled when he saw that, aware that that was Al's preferred opening move when using a saber. This was because he looked as if he was not about to do anything when in reality, he was already formulating the best way to kill you.

"Lady Hermione?" Al asked, almost casually.

Harry smiled, "You asked for her to go with Francesca" he replied, "I imagine that the two of them are having fun on the range right about now" he inclined his head towards the sword that Al was carrying, "Is that the reason that you asked for me?"

Al smiled, suddenly, he lunged forward toward Harry. As the battle wizard was lunging, he brought his sword up in an upward slashing motion. Aware that he could not block the attack, Harry stepped back, but at the same time that he did, he prepared to counterattack.

Harry allowed Al's sword to slash the air in front of him, and then when that was done, Harry executed his own upward diagonal slash. Al, aware of this, used the momentum of his earlier failed attack to execute a one hundred eight degree turn to evade Harry's attack. By the time that he recovered and was again facing Harry, his body was perpendicular to Harry's and he held his sword horizontally and level to his neck.

"Yes and no" Al replied with a smile, he charged forward again, this time, trying a single thrust for his attack, Harry sidestepped to evade the attack and as he was doing so, he brought his sword up and tried to do a horizontal strike against Al's unprotected back.

Al evaded the attack by moving forward. He shot past Harry and in short order; the two men had exchanged position, "Why did you ask for me then?" Harry asked.

Al grinned, "Well, aside from the fact that I wanted to see if you could last against me now – you barely lasted a minute against me the first time that we tried this, if I may so politely remind you – I wanted to talk to you about how Voldemort was able to remain alive even after getting hit by the killing curse"

Harry nodded, this time, he took the initiative and initiated his attack first. Harry approached his sword mentor at a run, and then at the last possible moment, he sidestepped and tried a horizontal slash towards Al's unprotected side.

Al, however, was more than prepared for this and easily evaded the attack by again running forward, thus, the two men again changed positions, "Why is Hermione not here then?" Harry asked as he recovered, "If this had something to do with how Voldemort managed to do what his name implied, then I think she should know"

"She would, Your Grace, I assure you" Al replied – a little too tensely, in Harry's opinion – "but I wanted to run it with you first because we

are sure that at this point in time, it is no longer just a theory, it is a very likely possibility"

Harry blinked, he hefted the sword of Gryffindor towards Al and asked, "And are we to have this discussion while we are attempting to hit one another?"

Al merely smiled as he inclined his head towards the Duke, "I figured that we can hit two birds with one stone should we discuss what intelligence I found while I test your fencing skills, my Lord" he replied. He lunged forward, Harry evaded by stepping back.

"And why should you run it by me first before you tell Hermione?" Harry asked, he lunged forward, but again Al evaded by stepping forward, though this time, as he was moving forward, Al spun his upper body giving him a completely unobstructed and unprotected shot at Harry's back.

Harry felt the stinging hex on his backside, telling him that – once again – he had lost the match against his mentor.

"That was fun" Al said as he and Harry sheathed their swords. The battle wizard glanced at the Duke and smiled, "We should try that more often, you know" Harry glared at the older man but nodded, "Now, to your question" Al said, "I am not going to tell Lady Hermione"

"But you just said...." Harry began to protest.

Al held up his right hand, cutting out whatever protest that Harry had in his throat and said, "I am not going to tell her, you are" he replied, he sighed, and Harry could tell that it was a tired sigh, though the Duke was sure that it had nothing to do with their bout – Harry had witnessed Al take down twenty men in as many seconds without breaking a sweat with his sword – rather, it looked as if Al really did not want to say whatever it was that he was about to say, "What do you know about Horcruxes?"

"First time that I am hearing it" Harry admitted.

Al nodded, "Quite common in the East, if you would believe" Al replied, he sighed and then added, "Simply put, a Horcrux is a

container that houses a soul of a person, for so long as it exists, then the person cannot die"

Harry blinked, "And Voldemort...?" he asked.

"Created at least two of them" Al nodded, "We suspect seven, surprised the lads and lasses at intelligence, let me tell you that"

"I take it that this is not something that you just decide to do after a round of beer with your friends" Harry commented.

Al smiled, "Yeah" he replied, he sighed and then added, "To rend one's soul into two, one must perform the ultimate desecration" he looked straight at Harry's eyes and said, "Murder"

"Well Al, it's not as if Voldemort is incapable of killing seven people" Harry replied.

Al smiled, "You don't understand Harry" Al began after a few moments of looking at him as if he had lost his senses, "It's not an easy procedure, rending your soul, and to rend it six times? No wonder Voldemort was insane"

Harry nodded, "We really do not have time to wonder about his sanity Al, we need to destroy him" he replied, he looked at the Battle Wizard and asked, "I assume that intelligence has identified at least some of these containers?"

Al nodded, "We think that one has been destroyed already, by yourself" at the confused look on Harry's face, Al continued, "The diary"

Harry blinked, "That was a container?" he asked.

"It was what made us assume in the first place" Al replied, "Intelligence took a good look at all of your memories, and we realized that we are dealing with a Horcrux. Since Voldemort did not disappear after you destroyed his diary, we assume that there was at least more than one, and since seven is a powerful number, well...there you are"

"These containers?" Harry asked.

"Hogwart's Founders Items" Al replied, he sighed and then said, "Using our connection with HM Government, we were able to secure a search warrant against the vaults of everyone in the Death Eater list. The Goblins were not happy about it, and they were angrier when we found one of these items in the vault of the Lestranges"

"I take it that the goblins do not like these items any more than we do" Harry commented.

"Quite" Al replied, he waved his hand and two chairs appeared out of thin air. The battle wizard motioned for Harry to take a seat and Harry did so, followed by Al, "Hufflepuff's Cup" Al said, "The goblins have a process of forcing the soul out of the item, so the item was not destroyed, Gringott's curse breakers then took care of the soul" Al smiled, "Rather, Gringott's curse breakers were supposed to take care of the soul, but then the Goblins found out, the piece of soul in the cup had already been destroyed"

"And?" Harry asked, sensing that there was something that his chief bodyguard was not telling him.

Al was positively gleeful as he added, "They estimate that the soul occupying the item was destroyed the same day that you and Lady Hermione shared your first kiss" he said, he began laughing as he added, "Sirius and Remus then informed me that Lemon-Drop had always thought that you had a connection with the Dark Lord"

"Harry" Al continued, "You had a connection with him because you were a Horcrux"

Harry blinked, digesting the information. After a few moments, he nodded and replied, "I take it that is the reason why you did not invite Hermione"

Al nodded, "I cannot imagine what fuss my Lady Hermione would have put up if I were to announce to her that you were a Horcrux" he admitted, "but that is the key point in there, Harry, you were, not you are, you were"

"Explain in detail" Harry demanded.

"Well, I cannot" Al admitted, "I do not have the necessary background of understanding of these items, you see, but our own curse breakers have a theory"

"Out with it" Harry demanded once more.

Al smiled, "No matter how much you rend your soul, there would always be a connection between the soul piece and the original soul, that is the reason why you had a connection with Voldemort," he explained, "but after sharing your first kiss with Lady Hermione, and after we witnessed the golden bond between the two of you, we theorize that the love that you share with her was more than enough to drive the spirit away"

"Dumbles always did say something about that" Harry realized, he looked at Al and said, "It was my mother's love for me that drove him away during my first year"

"Well Lemon-Drop got that one right" Al said, "Voldemort cannot stand love, he flees from it. The love that you share with Lady Hermione forced his soul piece out of you, but said soul piece put up quite a fight."

"Riddle was not one to give up" Harry said, realizing where Al was going, "And because the soul pieces are always connected, the soul piece in me tapped into the other souls, draining their own power, but it still was not enough" he looked at Al, "the power discharge was so high, Voldemort did not have enough power to maintain it and his soul pieces died one by one"

Al nodded, "We also theorize" he continued, "that the main soul piece, the one that Voldemort has in his magic body, was able to sever the connection"

"If he did not, then he would be dead" Harry finished for Al, and then he nodded, "And since the Dark Mark binds the soul of the marked to Voldemort, so would his other Death Eaters"

Al smiled, "Precisely" he replied, and then he sighed, "I guess that we can say that the prophecy was correct, Lord Harry, you have the power that Voldemort-knows-not, and you used it to render him mortal again" Al's smile broadened as he added, "Intelligence have petitioned the American government to question Lucius Malfoy and

all other Death Eaters that we have captured and handed over to them, between the intelligence that we can get from them, we are reasonably sure that we will find the Dark Lord soon enough"

"Air strike?" Harry asked.

Al nodded, "Why should I endanger the lives of my men when we can just bomb him to oblivion?" Al asked rhetorically, "I would have loved using a Fuel-Air Bomb on his ass, but I guess that would depend on where he is"

Harry nodded, "Then we are done?" he asked, he elaborated, "After we kill Voldemort, Hermione and I can live in peace?"

Al sadly shook his head, "Unfortunately, no" he replied, his eyes turned serious as he added, "Dumbledore is still in the equation, and we need to handle him with care"

Harry nodded, "He is widely respected by the magical world" he admitted, "they would not accept the fact that he is also a Dark Lord" he added bitterly, "I just want to live a normal life with my wife and, hopefully, have children in the future"

"I do not envy that" Al replied.

Harry looked at Al and asked, "Are you getting over her?" he asked, Al blinked, unsure of where Harry was going, necessitating the Duke to elaborate, "Hermione told me about the way that you and Irina looked at each other"

Al smiled, "Irina" he replied, he sighed and looked at Harry, "We are lovers, I would not deny that, but there is a reason why we cannot be together," Harry opened his mouth, no doubt to ask why, but before Harry could push the words out of his mouth, Al continued, "You best ask her yourself because I promised her that I would not reveal it to anyone" Harry noticed that Al's right hand had moved to his neck. With a smile, Al pulled a heart-shaped locket from within his shirt.

"This is Nica" Al said, opening the locket and showing it to Harry.

The Duke accepted the locket and looked at it. It was a standard heart-shaped locket with two portraits within. The portrait to the right

face of the heart, Harry instantly recognized as Al, but the portrait to the left face, Harry studied.

Veronica Charlotte Karstens was written on the side of the heart in a neat script, and Harry guessed that that was her full name. She was beautiful, with long medium-blond hair draping both of her shoulders in the portrait, chocolate-brown eyes, and a very beautiful smile, "She's beautiful" Harry said.

Al smiled, "She was my everything" he admitted, and then he smiled, "I do not think I can find anyone else that would replace her"

There was something there, Harry noted, something that Al was afraid of saying, so Harry just nodded.

Slytherin Common Room

Draco Malfoy was desperately trying to rally the students that had volunteered for the special mission that their Head of House had given them, but he was finding that difficult at the moment as the team talked with one another and debated whether or not this was such a good idea.

"Come on guys" Draco said, "We are going to go against a mudblood, and there are more of us, we do not need to fear him"

"He is not a mudblood, Draco" Pansy Parkinson said, "He traces his bloodline back towards the days of Merlin"

"Then why does he serve Potter, the half-blood bastard?" Draco asked, he smirked, "Don't worry, he is just covering up, we can take him"

"You don't understand Draco" Vincent Crabbe said, "He took down Madam Umbridge without even raising his wand"

"Theatrics" Draco replied, Crabbe was about to remind Draco that there was nothing theatric about those lightning bolts coming out from the sky, but then realized that of course Draco would think that it was nothing more but theatrics – the blonde ponce was not there when Al York took down Umbridge, "Professor Snape ordered us to take him down, we are Slytherins, we can take him down"

"What's your plan" Theodore Nott asked, "I mean, we sure as hell cannot take him head on"

Malfoy nodded, "We are Slytherins" the blonde ponce announced proudly, bringing himself up to full height and proudly pushing his chest out, "We ambush him, he won't know what hit him"

Thirty Minutes Later

Al was walking along the long narrow hallway that lead to one of the side entrances to the castle when he felt it.

The DADA professor smiled – or at least, his lips curled up – as he identified the twenty different signatures that had assaulted his mage sight. He easily identified nineteen of the signature as belonging to Slytherin students, while the twentieth was indiscernible.

The fact that it was imperceptible had allowed Al to identify the owner of the signature. After all, there was only one person in the entire castle that Al had not met.

Al paused, he was careful not to spring the ambush that was planned for him so he made it look as if he was unaware that there were now twenty wands pointed at him. The former SBS member then studied the chosen fatal terrain and found himself congratulating the Slytherin students, for they appeared to have had some familiarity with what Sun Tzu had said in his Art of War.

The chosen fatal terrain was perfect for an ambush, as it was narrow and provided the ambushers with enough cover. Al imagined that the students were frightened of coming up head-on against him, but then again, Al reminded himself that he would be frightened of coming up head-on against himself, and he was a holder of four masteries, a dueling champion during his day, a dark-creatures hunter, and a former member of the SBS.

Al continued walking, placing himself in harm's way, though Al knew that there was nothing that these students could do that would seriously harm him. As he was walking, Al extended his mage sense forward and sure enough, he was able to identify Snape close-by. A feral grin crossed Al's face as he realized what Snape's plan was.

At that moment, a curse flew from one of the places where Al had already identified an attacker. Al allowed the curse to hit him – he knew that it was the torture curse – and then paused. The first torture curse was followed closely by no less than fifteen other torture curses, and Al allowed all of them to hit him.

If the students were expecting him to scream or to drop on the ground, however, they were sorely disappointed, for Al just stood there after receiving no less than fifteen torture curses. Indeed, Al looked as if not a single one of the curse had hit him, and from the students' point of view, the DADA professor had not even raised a shield.

Lightning flashed outside and all of a sudden, the temperature in the hallway dropped considerably. A chilling wind started to blow all around Al and it extended from him, slowly transforming into a slow whirlwind as spare parchment thrown on the floor by students returning from their classes were picked up by the wind.

Draco Malfoy was smiling when he saw the DADA professor accept the fifteen torture curses, he was the first one to fire. The blonde thought that they had taken down the DADA professor, but then, when he saw the whirlwind forming – and Al York just standing there – the blond pureblood wet himself as he felt the sense of dread spreading around his body.

He was hardly the only one who did, and quite a few of the female members of the ambushers began crying.

"Fire again!" Draco ordered, momentarily regaining control of himself.

Curses were fired towards Al again, and again, Al just stood there and accepted the curses fired against him. "Again!" Draco shouted, sending his third round of the Cruciatus curse against Al.

"What is happening here?" Professor McGonagall, Professor Flitwick, Professor Sprout and the Headmaster had all felt the magic levels being exerted. A few moments later, a team of twelve Aurors – with Kingsley Shacklebolt on the lead – appeared in the hallway. The devices in the ministry had detected the curses being fired several times and they were dispatched to see why an unforgivable was being fired in a school.

There was another flash of lightning, and all of a sudden, the whirlwind died, spare parchment fell to the floor. There was silence for a few moments, and then twenty loud thuds were heard as twenty students wearing the Slytherin green fell out of the broom closets and wherever else they were hiding, stunned.

Snape was gleeful as he approached Al, "Attacking students is not behavior apt for a Hogwarts Professor" he said, he looked at Dumbledore and said, "Headmaster, I am afraid that I must ask for Professor York to be terminated as he attacked my students"

"What were your students doing here in the first place?" Professor McGonagall said.

Snape's smile faltered a bit, but before he can answer, Al replied, "That is quite alright, professor, we both know that Professor Snape has asked his students to ambush me, and as I was defending myself, I am within my rights to attack them" he smiled towards the Potions Master and summoned the wand of Draco Malfoy by just pointing at it, "Auror Captain" Al said, handing the wand to Kingsley, "Please?"

Kingsley took the wand and cast the Priori Incantantum spell upon it. The last five spells came back as two cutting spells and three torture curses, "Whose wand is this?" Kingsley asked.

"Draco Malfoy" Al replied with a smile.

Kingsley nodded and turned towards the Headmaster, "Headmaster" he said, "When the boy wakes up, please inform him that he is under arrest for using the torture curse against his professor" the Auror then motioned for his team members to start testing the other wands. After all wands returned positive for the torture curse, Kingsley turned towards Dumbledore and added, "Inform all of them that they are under arrest for the use of the torture curse against their professor"

TWENTY ONE

Ministry of Magic

London, England

The tension in the Ministry of Magic was palpable as the workers flooded in. For every five ministry workers who entered the ministry that morning, four of them had their eyes darting to and fro, searching for any threats.

Their reaction was understandable; after all, they had just finished reading the headlines of their newspaper, a headline that proclaimed that there had been a mass break-out in Azkaban prison just this morning.

In reaction to that, the Council – under the leadership of Sirius Black – had requested and had been authorized, to augment the security forces in the Ministry. As Sirius and Al did not want the majority of the magical world to know just how large an Army they had under their command, the Council had decided to hire a foreign private military company to provide them with their security.

The presence of these foreigners, instead of calming the nerves of the workers in the ministry, was actually detrimental as they eyed everyone that came into the Ministry of Magic with a disdainful eye and undisguised hostility.

Sirius was not only aware of this, he was the one who suggested it in the first place, though he did so without asking his fellow Council members. The former prisoner felt that they should strike fear into the hearts of the workers in the ministry as soon as possible so that their job would be accomplished easier.

He did not tell his fellow members of the Council – despite the fact that he was supposed to – because he knew that they would not agree. After reading the Daily Prophet this morning, however, Sirius was half-sure that the Council would agree should he broach that topic today.

With a sigh, however, Sirius decided against informing the others, if only to ensure that they would focus on the hearing that he had set for today.

Sirius stood from his chair, shuffling some papers that he had read just a few minute ago in regards to the career of the person that they are about to question. This would be the first time that the Council would actually question someone in relation to their charge, and Sirius could only hope that nothing would go wrong today.

Fearing that the escaped Death Eaters – and Voldemort – would make an appearance to disrupt the hearing, Sirius had decided to actually place his personal bodyguards around the chamber where they would be having their hearing.

"Sir" the senior aide that Sirius had procured for his position – a young witch from the Goblin liaison office – said as she peeked her head into his office, "they are ready for you".

"Thank you" Sirius replied, flashing a smile towards his aide, who blushed before ducking away from the notorious Sirius Black.

Sirius grabbed his coat – no one in the Council wore robes – before he made his way to the Chamber where they would be having today's hearing.

Turning to the corner that would take him to the chamber, Sirius saw young Percival Weasley arguing with one of the members of the Private Military Company that they had contracted. The junior secretary to the minister was animatedly trying to convince the guard that he was needed by the minister, but the Greek wizard guarding the chamber had forgotten that he was able to understand and speak English.

Biting back a smile, Sirius pushed past them – much to the irritation of Percy – and into the room where he saw more members of the PMC and his own bodyguards in addition to members of the press.

"Sirius" Amelia – seated to his right – greeted him as he took his seat. Sirius inclined his head towards her, returning her greeting, before he greeted the other members of the Council.

Turning towards the man who was seated before them – ironic since just a few months ago, he was the one doing the questioning in a high-profile case – Sirius greeted him a good morning pleasantly.

Cornelius Oswald Fudge amicably returned the greeting, even though deep inside, he was worried about what the hearing would reveal.

"Are we ready?" Sirius asked the room in general, there was a general nodding of heads, before he turned his attention back towards the Minister for Magic and asked, "Are you ready, Minister?"

Fudge nodded, and Sirius asked his first question, "Minister, for the record, please state your full name and position"

"Cornelius Oswald Fudge, Minister of Magic" he replied.

"For, Minister, minister for magic" Sirius corrected him, he pretended to scowl as he added, "The mandate to rule over anything in the British Isles resides in the Crown, hence, you are nothing more but a representative of the Queen of the United Kingdom"

Fudge nodded.

"Very well" Sirius said, "Let us formally begin the questioning" he turned towards Broderick Bode and said, "Broderick, you have the floor".

"Thank you Sirius" Bode replied, he turned his attention towards the Minister and began asking his questions. Since most of the Unspeakable's questions had something to do with the Minister's administration, there were very few quirks that came up. It would seem that despite everything else, Cornelius Fudge had a talent for administration.

Amos Diggory and Arthur Weasley both declined to examine the witness, leaving Amelia Bones and Sirius. Amelia came first, and she was merciless.

"Minister" the head of the DMLE began, "Why did you approve the budget cuts proposed by Lucius Malfoy in the spring of 1987, three months after you became Minister for Magic?"

"We did not think that there would be any danger from You-Know-Who and his followers by this time" Fudge replied.

Amelia nodded, but she was not finished, nor was she willing to let this go, "But why did you do this without asking for a second opinion?" she asked, her pleasant tone masking the venom in the question.

"I did not know that he was a Death Eater, Madam Bones" Fudge replied, "As such, I thought that he was an honest member of society, so I thought that his suggestion was sound, I now regret having ever listened to him".

Madam Bones continued questioning Fudge, each of her question had revealed a lot of oddities in Fudge's career, including a smoking gun that had everyone in the audience questioning how the Minister for Magic – whose annual salary was fifty thousand galleons – could afford a manor for himself that was worth fifteen million galleons?

"Minister," Amelia continued her grilling, "As soon as you've explained where you got the money to buy your manor, would you also please explain to us how you got your vacation villa in Nice, your vacation villa in Amalfi, and another one in Crete?".

Amelia was in surefire mode now as she did not even give the Minister a chance to defend himself, before she continued, "You can also explain to us where the contents of Vault 826, Vault 992, Vault 1123, and Vault 4256 came from, in addition to what appeared to be several financial inconsistencies from your office".

"Madam..." Fudge began

"Minister" Madam Bones cut him off, "You can also explain to us how thirty million galleons meant for my Aurors disappeared overnight. How fifteen million galleons meant for the Accidental Magical Reversal Squad was somehow labeled as funds for your office, and how eight million galleons that was meant for St. Mungo's ended up in the pockets of your Senior Undersecretary".

"Madam Umbridge" Fudge began, "did all of it".

"Then how was she able to retain her position as your senior undersecretary for close to a decade, Minister?" Amelia asked, "She had been your undersecretary since your days in the AMRS".

Fudge tried to make himself smaller, but ultimately failed as Madam Bones followed up with another question, "What is the extent of your involvement in the attempted murder of Harry James Potter earlier this year that your undersecretary had arranged for?"

By the time that Madam Bones was showing signs of stopping, Sirius had to announce that they would have to continue the hearing tomorrow since they had only scheduled it for only until before lunch.

"Why did you stop me?" Amelia asked Sirius after everyone in the chamber – save for the members of the Council and the bodyguards – were gone, she looked angry at Sirius and said, "He would now try to bury the evidences".

Sirius smiled, "And how would he do that?" he asked rhetorically, "We have all the certified true copies of all evidences stored in a vault at Gringotts and the Ministry, if the real ones start telling us a different story, then we would know that Fudge has done something, if that were the case, then we would have another reason to drag him".

Amelia – and the other members – nodded, conceding that Sirius was correct. Arthur, however, had something else bothering him, "Isn't this a little vindictive Sirius?" he asked, "Dumbledore had asked me to ask you where you intend to go with this".

Sirius smiled, "I'll be more than happy to tell you" he replied, inclining his head, "Anyone up for lunch? My treat?"

Everyone – Arthur excluded – begged off, which was exactly what Sirius and Al had hoped for. Sirius's suggestion that they 'go muggle' and eat something on the muggle side of London was also part of the plan.

As Arthur and Sirius walked towards muggle London, the sounds of the laughter of both men emanated from the halls of the Ministry. No one who saw them that afternoon was aware that that was the last time that they would see Arthur Weasley under the influence of a love potion – seeing that they did not even know that he was under the influence, well, they really would not be able to tell the difference.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

The Room of Requirement – otherwise known as the Come-and-Go room – was an amazing room. The user could find anything that he or she would ever need in the room, but only if the user would think about it.

Right now, that was where Harry and Hermione were sequestered. After hearing that Al had been attacked by no less than twenty Slytherin students, their personal bodyguards herded them into the room.

Fearful of another ambush – this time against their charges – the men decided not to bring their charges to the more secured camp, preferring instead to drag them to the seventh floor of the castle, push them inside, and then fortify the corridor that led to the room with overturned furniture, shrieking portraits, suits of armor, assault rifles and heavy machineguns.

Five minutes after they were virtually imprisoned in the room, the door opened yet again as Neville, Luna, Fred and George were also shoved inside the room, this time, by Al.

The battle wizard, however, decided not to say any word to them and left to coordinate – or what else he was supposed to do – his men.

"Right" Harry said as soon as everyone had settled down – Harry had to wish for a cushion on the wall behind him since he was sure of what Hermione would do after he told her what Al had said – "there is something that I want to tell all of you".

Everyone turned their attention towards Hermione, but she did not meet their eyes, instead, she was focused entirely on her husband. That was the only indication that everyone needed to know that whatever it was that Harry wanted to say, Hermione was not aware of it.

"Al and Intelligence have found the reason why Voldemort did not die that Halloween Night" Harry began, he looked at Hermione and added, "He created soul anchors, love".

"But..." Neville began, and then his protest died in his throat as he remembered who it was that they were talking about, "I see, well, it's not surprising since that is considered to be the darkest dark ritual in the world," he nodded as he added, "Riddle would have tried it if only to prove that he is a Dark Lord".

"Unless we destroy them, we can nuke Tom and he would still be alive" Harry said. Watching the frown on the face of his wife, Harry said, "No worries, though, Al assured me that every soul anchor has already been destroyed, if we kill him, this time, he will stay dead and the best part is anyone can do it."

Hermione nodded, and as Harry expected, she jumped to her feet and tackled him in thanks for finding a way to end Voldemort without actually risking his life, even if it was not him who did the research and even if Al had told Harry that Hermione had an equal part in it.

"Love" Harry said slowly pushing Hermione away to his arm's length, "there is something else" he looked directly at her eyes and said, "my scar was one of the soul anchors".

Hermione – and the rest of those who heard that – blinked, and then she looked at him, "But you said...." She began

Harry smiled at her and engulfed her in a hug once more, "I know" he replied, soothing her by running his hand up and down her back, "all have been destroyed"

"How?" Hermione asked. She was still in her husband's arms so she did not raise her voice, keeping it low intentionally so that only the two of them knew the secret.

"You kissed me" Harry stated.

"Of course I did, I did not see you complain before" Hermione replied, there was a slight tone of irritation in her voice that resulted from the fact that she did not think he answered her question.

Harry laughed; his right hand index finger touched the tip of her nose, slightly pressing against it, before he repeated what he had just said, "You kissed me"

Hermione frowned, "I know I did..." she paused, she looked at him with an incredulous expression and Harry nodded. She stared at him for a few seconds, and then she shrieked before she kissed her husband again.

"Love" Hermione said after she finished kissing her husband – she kissed him six times in as many minutes – "Love, dark rituals always have to have hatred in it somewhere, if you factor in love, then it reverses the entire equation" she bit her lower lip as she added, "I'll have to check my Arithmancy first, of course, but I think that that is the reason".

"Well, everyone knows how smart you are, Hermione" Neville said – reminding the couple that they were not alone in the room – before he pointed them to Fred and George, both of whom had cameras on their hands, "but I didn't think you would be handing blackmail material to these two that easily"

Harry smirked, "Everyone knows anyway, what's the point?" he asked rhetorically, he looked at the twins and said, "I would love a copy though"

"Anything for you Harry" the twins said at the same time.

"Now, we only need to..." Fred began

"...get out of here, so that we can..." George continued

"...develop the pictures" they said in unison.

Dungeons, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Severus Snape was packing his bags. He knew that there was no way that he could escape incarceration this time, those students who were stupid enough to be caught by Al York would sing when they were force-fed veritaserum, and the potions master was not willing to bet that Al York would take the age of the kids in consideration. The man hit them with stunners so powerful that even after two hours, none of them had woken up.

Snape knew that he had to get out of the castle. Fortunately, the camp that Al York and his muggle friends had set up was on the other side of the Whomping Willow. Snape planned on using that passageway to get to Hogsmeade where he could then apparate to the side of the Dark Lord.

A few hours of torture would be nothing compared to a minute in Azkaban, so Snape was prepared to incur the wrath of the Dark Lord for leaving Hogwarts without his permission.

Snape had already packed his bags and was about to disillusion them when the door to his office opened. Since the Headmaster was the only one who could do that, the potions master automatically assumed that it was Professor Dumbledore.

"I am sorry Headmaster" Snape said without looking at the intruder, "I have no choice but to leave, those brats would implicate me and I do not think York would be merciful"

"I am sorry to say that I am not merciful, Professor Snape" Al said, freezing Snape in his tracks, "And I am thankful that I am not Lemon-Drop"

Snape spun around, his wand at his hand, he pointed it to where he was sure Al would be standing, but when he looked, Al was not there. He spun around again, sure that the battle wizard had evaded his sight by following his turn, but the battle wizard was still nowhere in sight of the potions master.

"It is a shame" Al said, his voice seemingly coming out of everywhere, "that it had to end like this"

"Show yourself, you coward" Snape shouted at the top of his lungs, hoping to goad Al into showing himself and hoping to attract the attention of the portrait just outside his office.

"It is futile, Snape" Al replied, and then the battle wizard laughed, "You were a master occulumens, surely, you must know that you are now stuck in your own walls"

Snape blinked, he looked around and instantly noticed that Al was correct. This was exactly how Snape had built his walls, but he never felt the intrusion. He was sure that he was still in his office.

"Foolish" Al continued, "To think that you would be so gullible, so stupid, so vindictive that you threw away that which you desired the most when the going got tough because you would not look 'cool' to your other friends if you did not follow through".

Snape blinked, unbidden, the memories of what happened that afternoon after their OWL's came back to him. The master occulumens now knew that he was in trouble. Al was using his own memories against him, which went against the fundamentals of mind-reading. It should be the owner of the mind who should be controlling the images being shown to the intruder, not the other way around, yet, Al was doing exactly that.

"You refused to swim against the tide of bigotry that your house is famous for, Severus Snape" Al continued, "You decided that you would swim with them instead, and just because of a single word, you lost everything that you desired"

A scene from the wedding of James and Lily Potter came to the forefront.

"Yet" Al continued, this time, his voice was strangely softer, as if there was sadness laced in it, "You must have known that you never really stood a chance against James Potter. He was her soul-mate, she was his, and nothing, not even death, would have torn them apart"

"You know nothing!" Snape shouted.

"I understand what it meant Severus" Al shot back.

A new scene replaced the wedding of James and Lily Potter, this one, unfamiliar to Snape. He was standing on the flat deck of a ship, on the distance, he saw a couple kissing and he instantly recognized the soul bond forming between the two.

This scene was then replaced by another one, this time, it was dark, and there was rain. Snape found himself crouched on the ground with other men, on his hand, he was holding a long assault rifle which he instinctively somehow recognized as an FAL battle rifle.

"We are in deep shit" a voice behind Snape said, he turned around and saw another man approaching him. This person was also holding the same rifle as him, and Snape recognized him as the one who had been kissing that girl in the earlier image.

"The only way is forward Nicholas" Snape found himself saying.

The man called Nicholas agreed, "Forward is the only way" he agreed, he sighed and then said, "We would charge," he said, and everyone agreed, "we charge on my smoke"

Everyone nodded and the man called Nicholas threw a smoke grenade towards the kill zone. He waited until smoke obscured the target and then charged forward. Snape found himself following after, but then he aimed his rifle to the back of Nicholas's head and pulled the trigger.

The scene changed again, this time, it was morning again and Snape found himself staring at a door in the heart of London. He was carrying a bouquet of flowers on one hand and a briefcase on the other. He knocked twice on the door and a woman answered with a smile on her face.

Snape instantly recognized her as the woman who had been kissing the man called Nicholas, and when she saw him, the smile on her face was replaced by grief, "Francesca" Snape said in a low voice.

The woman called Francesca simply shook her head, refusing to hear anything that he wanted to say.

The scene changed again. This time, Snape found himself standing in freshly dug earth. Around him, he saw numerous white crosses driven into the earth, marking each and every grave. His attention was focused on the white cross in front of him, and the small marble rectangle upon the surface of which was engraved the name 'Victoria Francesca Graham'.

"I'm sorry" Snape said as he knelt before the freshly dug earth, "I'm sorry"

The scene changed and Snape found himself back in his office, this time, Al was standing in front of him, "I know" the battle wizard said in a soft voice, "what it felt like, what it feels like, to see the woman

of your dreams taken by someone else, I know what it feels like to be the reason for her death" Al smiled – a sad smile – and continued, "I found it, therefore, ironic that you would want to kill me when the two of us could have understood each other better"

Without saying anything, Al turned around, "Why?" Snape asked.

Al paused and turned back towards him, "Victoria Francesca Graham was the woman that I convinced myself that I would love till the end of my days, and even now, there is some truth in that, but we were never meant to be, she found love – a soul bond – with a great man, but I was selfish, I wanted her for myself, and so," he again smiled his ironic smile, "I killed him, shot him in the back of his head as he was leading us on a brave charge against an enemy position against the Argentines during the Falklands Conflict" he shook his head, "his death caused Vicky to lose her own will to live, she refused to eat anything, she refused to drink anything, she damn right near refused to see anyone, she died two days after I delivered the news to her"

"Lily..." Snape began.

Al nodded, "Yes" he replied, "I was the cause of Vicky's death, they could have been great, they could still be alive today had it not been for my pettiness, had it not been for my jealousy."

"Why..?" he began.

"Because you are different from me in a very small way" Al replied, "You still have your chance to change your life, I've lost mine many years ago, you can still change, Severus" Al smiled before he started to fade, "And this time, this really is one last chance"

Al completely disappeared before Snape. As soon as the image of Al was gone, Snape blinked and then he fell in on himself. Two days later, Dumbledore discovered that his potions master and pet death eater was no longer within the castle, by that time, however, the disappearance of Severus Snape had become a minor issue as a much larger one had popped up.

Hospital Wing, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Draco Malfoy opened his eyes and he knew at once that he was on the Hospital Wing. Strangely, he remembered everything that had led to him waking up in this part of the castle.

'Escape' a voice from behind his head said. Draco found himself agreeing, for he knew that if he did not, he would be looking at Azkaban as his permanent address.

The heir to the Malfoy family found his limbs and other bodily functions in working condition –strange, you usually felt sluggish after getting hit by a stunner, he thought – and jumped out of his bed.

Strangely, the boy also found his wand close to him and he easily acquired it, along with a spare –just in case, the boy thought – before he ran to the fireplace.

At that point, an Auror that Malfoy recognized as Kingsley Shacklebolt entered the hospital wing. The dark Auror saw Malfoy and drew his wand, "Ministry Aurors..." Shack began, but he was stopped when he suddenly dropped to his knee after getting hit by a stunner from Malfoy.

The sound that was generated when Shack fell alerted his two other Aurors waiting outside the room. Both entered with their wands drawn, but were too late – their primary concern, after all, was their team leader – to stop Malfoy from jumping into the fireplace and disappearing.

WENTY TWO

Malfoy Manor

England

Draco Malfoy stumbled into the wrought-iron fence that was the main entrance to the place that he called home. The blond school boy fell forward towards the fence – the result of nearly two days of traveling to and fro in an attempt to confuse what was sure to be a tracking charm placed on him without eating or resting.

As he was lying on the ground, he raised his head up so that he might see the rather imposing architecture that was Malfoy Manor. When he saw the familiar house – though now it was bathed in the dark, probably as a result of the Dark Lord hiding there – a smile crept up in his face before he fainted.

When he came to a few hours later, he was resting on his bed with his mother seated beside him in vigil. An everlasting candle was burning on the bedside table and Draco saw that his mother was not the only one in the room.

The eyes of the fifteen year old blond widened when he realized that he had seen the other woman in the room before. She looked a lot like his mother, only thinner and gaunter, and Draco – upon making that connection – instantly realized who it was that he was looking at.

"Aunt Bellatrix" Draco said.

Bellatrix Lestrange laughed manically at her nephew, "I am so glad that you can recognize me, Draco" she said, "You would make a very smart follower of the Dark Lord"

"You've escaped from Azkaban?" Draco asked.

"Hardly" Bellatrix replied, she started laughing again as she added, "The Dark Lord always rewards his most faithful followers"

"The Dark Lord broke you out of Azkaban?" Draco asked, and then his face broke into a grin as he added, "My father?"

Bellatrix shook his head, "I have heard from your mother what happened" she admitted, and then she shook her head again for emphasis, "Unfortunately, your father was not sent to Azkaban" her voice rose as she added, "Filthy muggles, thinking that they can lock up a great man just because he killed a few animals"

"Will the Dark Lord break him out?" Draco asked.

Bellatrix smiled maniacally, "The Dark Lord might allow him to roast in whatever prison the filthy muggles sent him for a few months as punishment for not trying to find him, but in the end, the Dark Lord will free your father" she nodded, "You do not need to worry about it"

For the first time, Narcissa Malfoy joined the conversation. She looked at her son with undisguised concern written in her face as she asked, "What happened?"

Draco sighed, "Professor Snape asked us to attack the new DADA professor" he began, eliciting a loud gasp from Narcissa. Bellatrix on the other hand just said 'teach the mudblood a lesson'.

Narcissa turned towards her sister and replied, "The man is Alvin York, Bella, not just anyone else"

Bellatrix blinked, "Alvin Charles York?" the escaped convict asked, "He's a pureblood" she announced, and then she turned her attention towards Draco, "Why did Snape want you to attack a pureblood?"

"I do not know" Draco replied truthfully, "We thought that he would be weak, Aunt, but he was strong" he whimpered as he added, "We attacked him, twenty of us, with the Cruciatus curse, but he just took it standing, he didn't even blink, much less scream in pain"

"You need to feel hatred for your target in order for the curse to work" Bellatrix pointed out. She was sure that that was the reason why Draco and the students were unable to perform the curse perfectly.

Her thoughts on the matter, however, were quickly shattered when Draco added, "We performed the curse perfectly, Auntie" he replied, he shook his head again for emphasis, "Even if we do not hate the target, I know that when you fire the curse, the target should feel

pain, he just stood there" he looked at his aunt with horror written on his face, "We fired the curse again, he just absorbed it, and then he attacked us with stunners"

"A teacher attacked a student?" Narcissa asked, horrified, "I shall be contacting the board of governors and I would see the man fired"

Draco shook his head, "The Ministry of Magic knows what we did" he admitted, "I barely escaped from the Hospital Wing".

"You should have gone down fighting, young Draco" a voice coming from outside the room of the Malfoy heir said.

All attention was turned towards the source of the voice and a few moments later found both Bellatrix and Narcissa kneeling on one leg before the man who entered the room.

Draco recognized him and threw himself at his knees as well in deference to the Dark Lord, "My Lord" Draco intoned.

Voldemort looked at the young Malfoy heir and sneered, but chose not to say anything because he needed the boy right now. Instead, the Dark Lord entered the room and sat himself at the chair that moments ago had been occupied by Narcissa.

Once the Dark Lord was seated, the other Death Eaters that had accompanied the Dark Lord entered the room and took their positions. As the Death Eaters were not wearing their masks, Draco recognized most of them.

His eyes widened when he saw some Death Eaters that were supposed to be in Azkaban. His face broke into a grin as he realized that the Dark Lord had attacked Azkaban and rescued his followers while he was incognito.

"Tell me of this Alvin York" Voldemort said in a soft voice.

"He was one of the few who never finished Hogwarts but has attained a mastery, my Lord" Yaxley, an undercover Death Eater in the Ministry, replied, "He has at least three masteries, in defense, charms, and transfigurations, but we suspect that he is hiding far more than just that"

Voldemort mused about this man. He was a pureblood so he passed the first test of being a Death Eater, and he appeared to be talented. Voldemort wanted him on his side and said as much, only to be disappointed when Yaxley said, "He is not with the Order, my Lord, but he is with Potter"

"What do you mean?" an enraged Voldemort asked, "He is a pureblood, why would he lower himself and serve with a half-blood bastard?"

"We do not know, my Lord" Yaxley replied, "What is known is that he will not join your side, my Lord"

"Then we should make sure that he is buried" Voldemort said, he turned to Draco and said, "Tell me of the security at Hogwarts, young Draco"

"There were at least fifteen Aurors when I made my escape, my Lord" the young Malfoy heir said, keeping his face down so that he would not have to look upon the face of the Dark Lord, he continued, "In addition, Potter has several of his bodyguards in the area"

"I was told that he claimed the title Duke of Gryffindor and had married a mudblood, yes" Voldemort replied with a nod, "Tell me of his bodyguards, are they magical?"

"I know not, my Lord" Draco replied, "yet, I do not think so, I have seen them practicing with muggle toys, my Lord" he then added, "the old fool does not trust them, while the bodyguards and their leader, Alvin York, do not trust the old fool."

"If we were to attack..." Voldemort mused, he paused for a few moments, as if he was thinking, and then he nodded again and continued, "Yes, we will attack, now when the lines within Hogwarts are divided and they are fighting amongst themselves, now is the perfect time" he turned towards Pettigrew and said, "You will lead Bella and those who have escaped from Azkaban – they are our most capable fighters – into Hogsmeade and into the secret tunnel under Honeydukes"

"It would be my honor, my Lord" Peter replied, bowing furiously.

Bellatrix, however, was far from honored. She looked at the balding rat-faced man, studied him for a few moments, and then turned her attention back towards the Dark Lord and began to complain, "My Lord, if the rat can tell us where the passage is located, and how to get there, we would not need him"

"That is true" Voldemort replied, and then he broke into a high pitched laugh that made the skin of those near him crawl, "but Wormtail is no good in a fight, only as a guide" he laughed again, "I would rather have him useful, for if he has no use to me, then he is better off dead"

Peter cringed, though he was easily able to keep himself from running away. The traitor knew that that was a surefire way to get himself killed.

Bellatrix narrowed her eyes as she looked at Wormtail, but then she nodded, accepting – just like always – the word of her master.

"I will lead the bulk of our forces and Apparate as close as possible to the school" Voldemort said, "We would provide the distraction while Bella and her team kill as many of those who are unworthy as possible"

"What of the students who are of worthy blood but chose to fight against us, my Lord?" Rabastan LeStrange – one of those who had managed to escape from Azkaban – asked.

"Sacrifice is necessary" Voldemort replied, "Kill them, hopefully, their deaths will teach others that fighting against me is useless"

Rabastan grinned, "It would be such a pleasure" he said.

"It is a shame that Grayback is no longer with us" Voldemort said, inclining his head towards Narcissa – she was the one who gave the report – "I am sure that he would have been thrilled at the prospect of biting many more children, but" he sighed theatrically, "no matter, no matter, we will not need him for this mission".

"When should we attack, my Lord?" Bellatrix asked, barely able to keep the excitement in her voice from breaking out.

"Tonight, my dear Bella, tonight" Voldemort said, he stood up and said, "Tonight, we shall announce to the world that I am back".

A deafening cheer from the assembled Death Eaters – it was deafening, considering the number of Death Eaters who were cheering in the rather cramped room – as the Dark Lord announced that he was finally ready to announce his return to the world. The amount of magic in the air started to double as emotions ran high in anticipation for the coming attack that the Death Eaters were sure they would win.

Unfortunately for them, they were too busy cheering that they failed to notice that the back-up wand that Malfoy was carrying – which was placed on the bedside table – had started to fizzle when the magic in the air doubled. For a few moments, the wand lighted up – though no one noted it as they were all too busy preparing for the coming fight – and then it subsided before a barely audible crack was heard – again, no one heard it.

The miniature runes that the research and development team that the Potter family had placed onto the miniature radio beacon that was buried in the interior of the wand that Draco Malfoy had grabbed as he was running away from the hospital wing has limits.

Unfortunately for those who were tracking the radio beacon, it had reached its limit after it was assaulted by more than twice the normal amount of magic, and promptly failed, magically electrifying the radio beacon and cutting it off from those who were listening in.

Unfortunately for those who did the cutting off, their location had already been marked. After waiting for ten minutes to make sure that the beacon had really been destroyed, the team aboard the galleon under the Black Lake started pulling maps of England to clarify where the radio beacon was last detected.

At the same time that this was happening, another team was trying to figure out why the runes failed. They easily came up with the reason, the runes were strong enough to ward magic away, but it has its limits. The team easily came up with a logical reason as to why the limit has been breached, because the magic was doubled because of the emotions of the magicals around the beacon. Logically, it can only mean one thing. The enemy was planning on making a move tonight.

After thirty minutes of checking, RAF Home Command had been warned of a possible attack by terrorist hiding within the United Kingdom. The warning came with a priority prefix that signified that the attack was imminent and it was highly advisable that the location be bombed in order to prevent the terrorists from launching their attack.

Hospital Wing, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Harry, Hermione and Al were patiently waiting for Remus and Tonks to give their report. The two had been sent to Cuba by Al after the battle wizard had been convinced that all of Voldemort's Horcruxes had been destroyed in order to gather information from the captured Death Eaters.

Right now, the two were still in Florida, but using the mirrors that Sirius Black and James Potter had made when they were still in school, a team had been able to set up instant communications between the camp and their two agents in the field.

Right now, Harry, Hermione and Al were seated on a wizard tent located in the middle of the camp, a rather large mirror showing both Remus and Tonks in front of them.

"We managed to speak with Lucius Malfoy and several other Death Eaters that were picked up by undercover teams roaming around magical Britain during the past few weeks," Remus reported. He produced a handbook and began reading from it, "Based on our interview from Malfoy, we can be reasonably sure that Voldemort is hiding in Malfoy Manor"

"Our electronics data team had also confirmed that the radio beacon that Malfoy had taken from the Hospital Wing has stopped broadcasting" Al said, he looked at Harry and confirmed with a nod, "The last known broadcast signal came from Malfoy Manor".

"Radio beacon?" Hermione asked, confusion evident in her face, and then her eyes widened as she made the connection, "that's the reason why you allowed Malfoy to escape in the first place, you

wanted him to go to where Voldemort was hiding so that you could track him"

Al smiled, "Of course" he replied, he looked at Hermione and added, "In a way, we are glad that Shack was the one who led the team that flooded in after detecting the signature of the torture curse".

"Why?" a confused Harry asked. The Duke was sure that Shacklebolt was a member of the Order of the Phoenix – Sirius and Remus confirmed it – so Harry was not sure why Al was saying that it was fortunate for them that Shacklebolt was the one who led the team who flooded in.

Al smiled towards Harry, "Think about your hearing last August, my Lord" he suggested. His smile broadened when the battle wizard, "Who was it that gave us the message that the venue of your hearing had been changed?"

Harry blinked. He thought about his visit to the Ministry, but unfortunately, he could not stop but think about the embarrassment that Al had handed the ministry at that time. Thanks to that, the Duke took a long time to remember, but remember, he finally did.

"Shacklebolt!" Harry shouted.

Al nodded, "Indeed" he replied, he nodded again and said, "Kingsley was our last agent in the Order, and we were forced to ask him to stay put after Remus, Sirius and Tonks left" he expounded on that, "We cannot afford to have Kingsley break with the Order, as Lemon-Drop believes that Kingsley is his main spy inside the Ministry"

"So it was part of the plan?" Hermione asked.

"Yes" Al replied, "I knew that Malfoy would be the one who would be most vengeful of the lot" he explained, "his father has recently been imprisoned, so the blond ponce would do anything that he could do to avenge his father, Severus Snape provided him with that opportunity, and thanks to Hec, we knew when they would be moving,"

"I will admit that we have been forced to move our schedule a bit though" Al said, he sighed and elaborated, "I would have wanted to

wait until Christmas break, but no battleplan survives first contact with the enemy"

"What are you talking about Al?" Harry asked.

Al sighed, "I think it's time that we prepare to evacuate Hogwarts, Harry" he said. Harry noted that the battle wizard had used his name this time. Although Harry had always insisted that Al refer to him by his first name, Al preferred to refer to him using his formal titles, though Harry was able to convince the man before to refer to him by his first name.

Harry now knew that Al would only refer to him by his first name if he was very serious.

"I thought that would be inadvisable" Harry noted.

"True, it would be" Al replied, but then he sighed before he shook his head, "but at this point, if Lemon-Drop is really prepared to go to the extreme, then we might have no choice".

"Explain" Harry said.

"We have intelligence reports coming in from Eastern Europe, where he is keeping his army" Al said, "it appears that several company sized units have disappeared from their camps and we fear that they are heading here" Al sighed again, "I do not think that my men would be overwhelmed by even a regiment size of wizard – they tend to stick to their wands – but I want to be prepared".

"What about Hec and the galleon?" Harry asked. He had never seen the 'galleon' before, so he was not sure how they would fare should a war erupt between Al and his men against Dumbledore and his army.

Al smiled, "Don't you worry about the Vanquisher," Al said, "She's more than capable of holding her own against Lemon-Drop, and if things are as bad as I hope it will not be, then we might be forced to use her for the evacuation".

"The other students?" Hermione asked.

"Precisely, Hermione" Al replied, he sighed and then elaborated, "My helicopters cannot take even half of the student population of Hogwarts, at least, not without leaving my men behind, something which I am not prepared to do, so if the situation turns bad, I am afraid that we might have no choice but to use Vanquisher for the evacuation".

"Is he getting desperate though?" Remus asked, he looked thoughtful as he added, "Perhaps his men are just moving to other positions?"

"Let us hope that that is the case" Al replied, and then he sighed, "But I fear that is not the case, and as I have said, I prefer to be ready".

Harry and Hermione nodded. A few moments later, Remus also nodded, though he did stir the conversation back to what they were supposed to be meeting about when he asked, "What shall we do about Malfoy Manor?"

Al merely smiled.

RAF Lakenheath

England

The alert warning that RAF Home Command had received in regards to a possible terrorist attack tonight was quickly filed by a secretary and the location referred to in the report was given a numerical prefix – 6882A.

Unfortunately, since it was only one report, there was nothing that the commander of RAF Home Command could do right away. He would have to wait for authorization from the chiefs-of-staff before he could even begin arming his planes.

Air Vice-Marshal Matthew Leigh-Evans, however, was also aggressive. Further, he recognized the real name of 6882A as he used to dream about buzzing the said area with his Harrier and dropping two six hundred fifty pound high explosive bombs in the area.

The niece of the Air Vice-Marshall had told him all about Malfoy Manor and how it was filled with the worst people who took great delight in calling her 'mudblood'. The Air Vice-Marshall might not know a single thing about magic or what the word really meant, but he knew an insult when he saw one, and he knew that Lily was being insulted when that word was said to her.

Further, the Air Vice-Marshall also recognized the person – or rather, the call-sign – of the person who made the report. It was a good friend of Lily by the name of Albert Blackwood. The Air Vice-Marshall had been told that this Blackwood was an agent for MI5, so he took the report seriously.

Still, there was nothing that he could do.

When a second report came in, however – this time, from the Americans who were interviewing some captured terrorists in their new facility in Cuba – bearing the same warning and the same location, Air Vice-Marshall Leigh-Evans knew that the fates had answered his prayer.

Without even pausing a bit – and before the secretary could leave his office – the Air Vice-Marshall said, "Tell Squadron Leader Connelly to get his Harriers fuelled and ready to go".

"Marshall?" his secretary asked.

"I want six Harriers fuelled and armed with four cluster bombs each" he repeated, "I am prepared to bet that the chiefs would be calling me soon enough and ordering me to launch an air-strike tonight, so I want to be ready"

"Sir" his secretary replied, he stiffened to attention and exited the room.

Five minutes later, the Air Vice-Marshall stood from his seat and turned his attention towards the runway of his base. Sure enough, he saw the six Harriers that he had asked for being prepped and armed.

Thirty minutes later, his blue phone – the one that was connected directly with the chief-of-staff's office – rang. He answered it in one

ring and in a short – less than ten minutes – conversation, Air Vice-Marshall Leigh-Evans had received an early Christmas present.

After acknowledging the man on the other end – the Chief-of-Staff of the Royal Air Force – that he understood the order, Air Vice-Marshall Leigh-Evans summoned his secretary and gave the order.

"Tell Squadron Leader Connelly" he said, "that he and his men are to attack a target tonight that has been marked as 'urgent' by the chiefs" he sighed before he added, "The target is reportedly the hiding place of a terrorist leader by name of Voldemort and his men, who call themselves Death Eaters. They are planning on attacking tonight, so this is urgent".

The secretary nodded and quickly passed on the order.

Within the hour, six Harrier jump jets, all equipped with at least four cluster bombs each, left the runway of RAF Lakenheath. Their pilots had been briefed that their target was a terrorist hide-out, but what they did not know was that they were about to end a civil war being fought in their own soil without their knowledge, only for another one – bloodier and more violent than the one that they were just about to end – to take its place.

PS: Last three chapters left.

TWENTY THREE

Malfoy Manor

England

The shouting in the mansion was hushed but it was urgent. This was understandable as the Death Eater Corps was about to embark upon a mission.

For many of the Death Eater's, they knew that this was the mission. They were finally going to strike against what they had seen as the greatest force that had stood against them during the first part of the reign of the Dark Lord.

Everyone in Malfoy Manor knew that when they succeeded in this mission, nothing and no one would be able to resist them. There would be no need for them to hide anymore since those who have had the power and the guts to stand up against them would be nothing more but corpses by the end of the day.

Like most typical Death Eater missions, there were those who remained behind. As standard Death Eater tactics call for them to overwhelm their enemies at the earliest possible opportunity – preferably before they even realize that they were under attack – those that would be left behind would be those who did not have the magical capacity to fight a prolonged battle.

They would have to wait behind and operate the emergency services of the Death Eater Corps. The Death Eaters might believe that they were superior, but they were not stupid enough to think that they would win this battle without suffering some casualties.

Those who would remain behind would be the ones who would be in charge of helping those who were lucky enough to withdraw to Malfoy Manor should they get themselves hurt.

With a maniacal grin written upon her face, Bellatrix Lestrange walked down the main hallway of Malfoy Manor while the lower level Death Eaters – mostly those who had just been recently recruited – stood at her flanks. Directly behind Bellatrix walked her chosen strike force – composed mostly of those who had escaped from

Azkaban and some of the older Death Eaters who had a good record in their struggle.

Bellatrix had decided to expand her strike force from the original orders of the Dark Lord. She felt that having only those who escaped from Azkaban to depend on during her mission would be foolhardy as they had no idea what kind of defenses that the castle had.

Bellatrix might be confident in her ability as a witch, but she was also a competent troop leader who did not like to leave anything to chance – most of the time.

Plus, Bellatrix did not really trust Wormtail. In her opinion, once a traitor, always a traitor and Wormtail was a traitor. She knew that the only reason that the rat had returned to their master was because he had been found out.

Bellatrix also had other issues with the rat man because not only was he able to avoid Azkaban – framing a friend in the process – he had also refused to help the Dark Lord – preferring instead to live as a rat – instead of actively seeking him out like what Bellatrix would have done had she been able to avoid the wizarding prison.

Bellatrix worried – perhaps reasonably so – that once inside the castle, Wormtail would turn tail – and coat – once again, leaving her strike team trapped behind enemy lines, seriously jeopardizing the attempted attack of the Dark Lord. Having more men in her force would allow them to stand longer, and possibly convince the traitor to stay with their side.

The Dark Lord appeared before the assembled strike force – they were scheduled to leave an hour earlier of the rest of the force so that they might get into position in time – and everyone knelt on one leg before Voldemort.

"Are you ready?" the Dark Lord asked in his high tone

"Yes, My Lord" Bellatrix replied, "We are ready, My Lord"

Voldemort nodded, "Good" the Dark Lord said, his tone showed his pleasure at hearing the words that his most loyal servant had spoken, "Good" he repeated, he looked at Bellatrix and said, "Then

lead your force into the castle at once, Bella, I will lead the rest of my Death Eaters and assault the castle from outside" he looked at the assembled entourage before him – those that were under Bellatrix's command and those that he would lead into battle himself – and allowed himself a humorless smile, "Soon" he said, "Soon...."

No one would know what followed after the words of the Dark Lord. In fact, no one would even know what the first words of the Dark Lord were.

Precisely five miles away, Flight Lieutenant David Bennington and his partner, Flight Lieutenant Charles Trevor simultaneously pressed a bright red button on the stick of their Harrier jump-jets as soon as they were able to rest the crosshairs in the house that was supposed to be their target.

The electronics system of the jump-jet recognized the command given by both pilots and sent out an electronic signal to the circuits that controlled the rocket engine on the four Paveway laser guided bombs that were mounted on both wings of both fighters.

The electronic signal ordered the small – relatively – rocket engine mounted behind the laser guided bomb to begin ignition before the missile was released.

Since the missile was released faster than the engine was able to ignite, for a few milliseconds, the bomb was just falling. Then, the rocket engine of the missiles ignited, spewing red hot flames behind the missile, propelling said weapon towards their target, Malfoy Manor.

Flight Lieutenant Bennington and Flight Lieutenant Trevor released four bombs each. Eight Paveway laser guided bombs streaked through the night sky towards the target, unseen, and relatively unheard.

Their missile firing duties done, the two RAF pilots pulled hard on their sticks, sending their fighters on a steady climb to assume cover duties while two other Harrier jets took their position.

The mission planners were reasonably certain that two bombs were more than enough to turn the house into a grave, but just in case

something went wrong, the mission planners actually put six aircrafts, each armed with four laser guided bombs, on the target.

For a few minutes, there was no sound, only light.

The two Death Eaters that were on guard duty that night saw the lights coming towards them, and both briefly wondered if they were shooting stars –I wish that we would win the fight at the castle tonight, one even wished – but as they were busy listening to the speech of the big man, they really did not pay attention.

By the time that they were inclined to pay attention, it was already too late.

For some reason, two of the bombs missed, hitting the gardens of the manor instead. The other six, however, were of a different story.

All bombs exploded where they were supposed to explode. The force of their explosion ripped the support columns of the manor, collapsing the entire second and third floor of the house on the ground floor. As the house had a basement, the ground floor also collapsed when the unsupported weight of the upper floors were piled on it.

Not only were the occupants of the house turned into pancakes by the upper two floors, they were also dropped a good seven feet. The drop might not have been fatal, but right after they were mostly dead by being crushed by the time that the floor upon which they were stepping on collapsed.

Any survivor would then have to survive through the burning inferno that consumed everything in the manor without their wands and unable to call upon their magic.

Two Death Eaters were able to survive – at least, their bodies did. These Death Eaters were the two who first spotted the missiles and thought that they were shooting stars. The force of the explosion blew them outward and away from the manor before it collapsed.

Unfortunately, the force of the explosion also threw them into the air. They might have survived the fall had they not fell upon the sharpened eight feet tall fences that marked the boundaries of Malfoy Manor.

In a dimly lit hallway buried within the most secret room of the most secretive branch of the Ministry of Magic, a particular prophecy sphere shined brightly for a few seconds before it splintered into a million tiny microscopic pieces.

The Dark Lord Voldemort had been killed by the hand of Harry Potter and the power he knew not, the power of more than two thousand pounds of high explosives packed in a stick and guided by an invisible beam of light dropped by a flying machine the Dark Lord really had no comprehension about.

The fact that the information that resulted to this bombing raid in the first place came from the bodyguards – therefore, the hands – of Harry Potter saw the prophecy uttered by Sibyll Trewlany more than fifteen years ago, and had resulted in the death of James and Lily Potter fulfilled.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

As he sat upon a bench with his wife beside him, Harry wondered why Al had asked for his presence – as well as the presence of Luna, Neville, and the Twins – this late at night.

It was really not that late at night, it was just that Al had never had a briefing like this during the evening. The Battle Wizard, Harry knew, preferred to conduct his briefings during the morning so that the participants could have the afternoon and evening following the briefing to work on what Al had said in the morning.

When Irina walked into the command tent with Al, Harry knew at once that it had something to do with the condition of Arthur Weasley.

As her husband watched the commander of his security force and his lover walk towards the podium mounted to the side of the huge communications mirror mounted on the far side of the tent, Hermione thought about the snatch mission that saw Arthur Weasley in the custody of Irina's team.

Harry and Hermione had been briefed by Sirius himself in regards to the snatch. The two members of the Council simply walked out of the Ministry of Magic and only one returned. Sirius reported that Arthur Weasley was feeling under the weather after he stuffed himself with muggle food during their brief foray into the muggle world.

The confirmed Muggle enthusiast then asked to be excused for the afternoon session before he apparated back home. The fact that there was a signature absolved Sirius of any blame in the sudden disappearance of the member of the Council. Not that anyone would have believed that Sirius would have had anything to do with the abduction of Arthur since the two were on the same side and against Fudge.

So, Hermione thought, not only were they able to save Arthur and bring him to the people who could help him, they were also able to imply that Fudge was using his power to pick off the members of the Council.

Amelia, Bode and Amos feared – perhaps rightly so – that they would be the next in line. All three had asked for Sirius's assistance and the head of the Black Family happily provided his assistance. All three remaining members of the Council were now guarded by the Private Military Corporation that Sirius had contracted with securing the ministry.

Hermione of course knew that the reason that Sirius provided the security in the first place was so that he knew where the other members of his team were. If worse came to worse – and Hermione was feeling that something big was about to happen soon, as did her husband – knowing where the three were would ensure that they could be safely evacuated.

As it was Sirius who arranged for the kidnapping of Arthur – though no one but those involved knew that – the three remaining members of the council were justified in their fears that they would be next, they only got the ones who were plotting it wrong.

"Good evening" Al said as he took the podium. Irina – as usual – stood to his side, and Al ignored her, "I apologize for scheduling the brief in the evening, but some news that I felt could not wait until tomorrow have reached us"

Al sighed, "First off, we are now sure that the lead elements of Dumbledore's Army have indeed entered the United Kingdom" he said, earning a surprised gasp from most of the officers assembled with Harry and his friends, "We do not know where they are right now, though we are reasonably certain that they are near," the battle wizard looked towards Harry and the Hogwarts' contingent and said, "We might have to evacuate earlier than anticipated, and I have asked the Vanquisher to get ready to surface within a moment's notice for the next forty eight hours"

"What about the helicopters?" Harry asked.

"We might have to leave them behind" Al admitted, he wiped his face with the back of his hand – a habit that Harry knew his chief bodyguard performed unconsciously if he was stressed out by what he was doing – before he continued, "If we are going to evacuate using the helicopters in an emergency situation, we will find ourselves under fire from below. The choppers might be shielded, but I do not think they can take a pounding like that"

Harry nodded, "And the rest of the student body?" he asked.

"The most critical one that is not with us right now is Susan Bones" Al replied, "As her guardian is Amelia Bones, and the Head of the DMLE has been classified as a VIP, we need to ensure that she is with us should we evacuate"

"I will speak with her this evening" Hermione promised.

Al nodded; he looked towards Irina and nodded. With a nod back to her lover, Irina took the podium and began to narrate the reason that she was here in the first place, "For those who were unaware" she began, "Lord Sirius Black was able to take Arthur Weasley into custody before bringing him to my team. With the patient in our care, and with the love potion used identified, we have been able to begin purging said foreign substance from him" she looked towards an elated Fred and George before she added, "We are looking at two to three months before he should be complete off of it, though he might have to take counseling for a good decade as a result of the complications that we have discussed before"

Fred and George nodded solemnly, "As long as he is fine" one of the twins said.

"What about Bill and Charlie?" the other asked.

"Through Gringotts, we were able to contact William Weasley" Irina replied, "He has been informed about the condition of your father and has promised to contact Charlie Weasley. He also promised not to inform your mother or other siblings about these findings and other events" she smiled, "in fact, he reports that he has received a letter from your mother telling him that your father was missing, Bill replied in a suitable manner befitting a relative of a missing person"

"How is the magical world taking the 'kidnapping' of dad?" one asked.

"Not great, for them that is" Al replied with a smirk. He elaborated, "Sirius was able to manipulate the media into believing that Fudge had something to do with it, while Fudge is desperately fighting back by blaming Sirius about it. At the moment, the public believes Sirius all the more since Fudge has already shown that he is incompetent and because of the results of his preliminary hearing" he paused before adding, "the public has lost every confidence in the Minister. Britain has become a laughing stock in the International magical community because of his actions this summer. Combined with the fact that he was actually pocketing money instead of sending it to where it was supposed to be going, his popularity has taken a rather large fist in the face"

"Lord Black" Irina continued, "was able to insinuate that it was your father who found out all about the backroom dealings of Fudge"

For a few moments, no one spoke. Finally, Harry asked, "What about Voldemort?"

Al smirked, "Won't be a problem anymore" he replied, he took the podium again and said, "Albert Blackwood received word that Malfoy Manor has been bombed two hours ago" his smirk turned into a smile as he continued, "We do not expect survivors"

"Albert Blackwood?" Harry asked.

Al smirked again, "I told you before that I have a lot of secret identities, Albert Blackwood is my MI5 identity" he explained.

Harry pouted, "I should have been told about the other ones" he replied.

Al smiled towards him, "You'll probably be made aware of them soon enough" he replied, "Anyway, those are the three things that I wish to speak with you about" he looked at the people assembled before him and scanned the faces, "Anyone has any questions?"

There were none so Al dismissed the company. When everyone left the room save for Harry, Hermione, their friends, and the pair of Al and Irina, Hermione looked towards Al and said, "Actually, I do have a question"

Al looked towards Hermione and inclined his head towards her, "By all means" he said.

"A personal question, Al, Irina" Hermione said, her gaze bore onto the brown eyes of Irina as she continued her question, "I would like to know the extent of your relationship with each other"

Al actually laughed, though Irina looked positively mortified. The Russian – for her name originated from – stared at Al with irritation written in her eyes before she turned her brown eyes back onto Hermione, "My Lady..." she began

"If you do not want to answer, then don't" Hermione said in a low voice, indicating that while she would respect her decision should she chose not to answer, she would prefer that Irina answer the question.

Al placed her hand upon Irina's shoulder, "I think" he began, "that you should tell them"

"You are the only one that I've told it to" she complained, "I do not think that it would be in their best interest to know" she stated.

"Perhaps" Al agreed. Hermione and the rest watched as his gaze bore into hers for a few moments –they look upon one another as if they are the only ones in this room, Hermione noted – before Al

continued, "I will not be here forever Irina, and I think that you should tell them so that they can help you"

Harry felt a sense of dread when he heard the words that his chief bodyguard had uttered, but before he could say anything, Al continued, "They should also know why you are our foremost expert in love potions, and you cannot tell them the reason for that unless you tell them that story"

Irina hesitated for a few moments, she looked towards Al, towards Hermione, and then back towards Al before she smiled a sad smile, "It probably would be for the best" she finally agreed, "Do you wish to listen to it again?" she asked.

Al shook his head, "Your story" he replied, he leaned in and gave her a chaste kiss on her cheeks before he turned towards their audience and announced, "I'll have to see to my men, goodnight" before he walked out of the tent.

Irina – and the others – waited until Al was out of the command tent before she began her story, "The reason" Irina began, "that I am the foremost expert in love potions among this group, is because I was subjected to it" she did not allow anyone to react to what she had just said and instead continued her story, "I was fourteen when I was first subjected to it, I was twenty five by the time I learned of it, and I was twenty eight before Al rescued me"

"Is that the reason why the two of you..." Hermione began.

Irina shook her head, with a tragic smile written upon her face, she turned towards Hermione and asked, "Has Al told you about his past?" at the nod from Hermione, Irina asked, "Veronica?" another nod, "East Asia?" another nod, "The Falklands?" again, Hermione noted. Irina paused for a few moments as she pondered her next question. Finally, she asked, "What about Vicky? Had he told you guys about Vicky?"

Hermione looked at Harry who just shook his head. Al had not told them about anyone named Vicky.

"I see" Irina replied, she hesitated, and then said, "That's his story to tell" before she sighed and continued with her story, "Suffice to say, Veronica was not the only girl that Al had given his hear to, there

were a lot of others" she looked pensive as she said, "I do not think that I am breaking his confidence in me when I tell you that every single girl that Al had fully given his heart to, every single one of them are dead"

Hermione and Luna gasped while Harry, Neville, and the twins nearly fell out of their chair. Hermione looked ready to cry, but Luna, she realized that there was something else at work. Having been told by Hermione – and to a lesser extent by Al himself – about what the battle wizard had done in the East, the smart Ravenclaw was able to come up with a conclusion.

"The curse of the nine tailed fox" Luna said.

"...I am cursed", Hermione remembered Al saying during that discussion about his past at Potter Island. He had said that he did not think that he would be able to find someone who could be like Nica was to him. What he meant was that he would not like to find someone who could be like Nica was to him. Suddenly, Hermione understood the reason why, despite the obvious attraction between the two, Al would not like to take his relationship with Irina a step further.

"He is protecting you isn't he?" Hermione asked.

Irina smiled, though it was a tragic smile, before she nodded. She kept quiet though, not really voicing out what she had just confirmed.

"You want to take it further" Harry suddenly stated. The Duke of Gryffindor knew that he was out of his league when his wife suddenly started asking their love potion expert about his personal life, but this was something that he could understand. He, after all, went through this when he was younger. Looking straight towards Irina, Harry asked, "That is the reason why you are here, because you want him to notice you, the reason why you became an expert in your field, you want him to accept you, for what you are"

Irina nodded, this time, she spoke, "You are correct, my Lord" she replied, before she sighed and said, "I know Al better than anyone in this contingent, I know that he is keeping himself from going that final step" she smiled, "I do not mind, I am confident in my heart and in my mind that he...likes me. Even if that was not the case, I am

fine with the fact that I like him as well" she sighed, "We do not know if it would be wise to allow this feeling to blossom into love, my Lord"

Harry nodded, he looked at Hermione – who was about to ask a follow-up question – and opened his mouth to say something but he was quickly cut off by an explosion followed by the loud sounds of pistols being fired.

"What the hell...?" Fred and George asked at the same time.

The resonance was quickly followed by the sound of battle rifles and general purpose machineguns being fired.

The flap to the command tent opened. Al walked in with a P-90 sub-machinegun strapped onto his chest, followed by several other similarly armed men. The battle wizard looked towards Harry and said, "We are too late"

TWENTY FOUR

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

The dark night sky of Scotland was broken as beams of different colors shot out from the direction of the castle towards the Black Lake. The targets of the different beams of light were not exactly idle either, as every few moments, a burst of gunfire would come from that position.

On the location that Al and his men had taken over for the parking areas of their helicopters, four separate fires burned as the hulk of the destroyed helicopters – hit by some sort of curse that caused them to explode – collapsed on itself thanks to the heat being generated.

With only fifty men under his command, Al had been unable to send troops into the airfield – separated from the main camp just by a tiny stretch of land – to try to salvage the helicopters.

In a scene that was strangely reminiscent of the trench warfare of World War I, the bodyguards of Harry and Hermione Potter – armed to the teeth with modern firearms – were holed onto their hastily dug trenches as the wizard army that Albus Dumbledore had kept hidden and secretly moved to Hogwarts attacked them with their long-range spells.

Al was the first one to admit that he had seriously underestimated the enemy. The battle wizard had thought that the enemy would not possess the capability to cast their curses at ranges greater than twenty meters and he thought that his firearms would be able to take down their adversaries before the wizards could even come within their maximum effective range.

Looking towards the lines of the enemy – they had formed some sort of phalanx with their first line holding shield charms while their second and third ranks rain down curses against the holed up bodyguards – Al realized how much he had been mistaken.

The enemies that he and his men were now facing were armed with some sort of staff that had somehow allowed them to increase the range of their spells.

Taking this into consideration, Al was forced to order his men to man their trenches while he tried to think of another plan to force the issue. With their modified focus that allowed them to increase the range of their spells, Al knew that their adversaries had negated the only advantage that he and his men have.

As he clutched his P-90 sub-machinegun, Al turned his gaze towards Harry and Hermione, the two students that he had sworn to protect. The Duke of Gryffindor was clutching a silver-chrome pistol while the Duchess was holding her black-chrome pistol, and both looked ready to start blasting their targets.

Further down the line, Al spotted Neville and Luna. Although both had been training on how to use firearms, the two felt that it would not be wise to rely on their rather questionable skill with modern firearms for a battle like this and had instead opted to have their wands drawn.

On the other side of the line, Fred and George were in the same situation. The Weasley twins had been using firearms before but felt that they could do more damage with their magic for this fight.

"Al" Harry said after Al pushed himself off the ground so that he could fire a few burst from his sub-machinegun against the enemy. After emptying his clip towards the general direction of the steadily advancing enemies, Al dropped back to his relative safe position and snapped a fresh magazine onto the magazine well of his P-90.

"I sent a few men to try to pick up Susan Bones" Al explained as soon as he pulled the charging handle of his firearm, "We are waiting for them to report back and once they do, I am going to send everyone back to the ship"

Harry nodded. Involuntarily, his gaze turned towards the direction of the airstrip and Harry gazed upon the burning helicopters. With them gone, the only way that they could withdraw from Hogwarts was by using the ship.

At that moment, Harry caught movement from behind the burning hulk, he tentatively aimed his rifle towards the area, but stood down when he saw that it was a group of five men and two girls. What was more important was that the two girls were wearing the robes of a Hufflepuff student while the five men were outfitted in a similar manner to the rest of the men that Al had under his command.

Al seemed to have seen them as well, because at that moment, he ordered his men to start falling back towards the lake.

"Set up our firing positions!" Al ordered to the retreating men as the battle wizard had opted to lead the group of men who were to provide covering fire as the first group withdraws.

Having been drilled by Al numerous times, the withdrawal execution was supposed to be perfect. The first group would withdraw under the cover of the second group and when the first group reached their position, they would turn and offer covering fire while the second group withdraws to their own position. Once the second group gets to their position, the first group would withdraw to their next defensive position.

This time, however, there was the slight complication of enemy forces firing at them while they attempted to pull off this complex maneuver. Still, Al was reasonably certain that while he might suffer casualties during the withdrawal, he would be able to get most of his men back to headquarters in one piece.

The members of the second group opened fire with their personal weapons. They were not really aiming at anyone, they just hoped to force their adversaries to duck and buy some time for the withdrawing first group. As Al had expected, when his second group opened fire, their adversaries just stood there.

Confident with their shield charms, Harry thought as he watched the wizards – all of whom were wearing blue robes that reminded Harry and Hermione of the robes that Dumbledore wears – just stood there and accepted the punishment.

At first, nothing happened as the rounds fired from the guns of Group 2 were deflected by the shields, then the onslaught provided too much for the wizards and their shield charms started to fail. Within a few moments, the first rank – and several from the second

rank – of the phalanx formed by the wizards started falling like sacks of potatoes.

After watching their compatriots fall, the surviving members of the wizard army dove for cover. Al was waiting for this since the battle began. A smile crept up the face of the battle wizard and his right hand retrieved a controlling device from within his combat jacket.

He showed the silver box with an antenna and a single red button to Harry and Hermione before he aimed the remote towards the open field and pressed the button.

There was a loud explosion that forced Harry and Hermione out of their cover so that they may look at the source of the explosion, and their eyes widened when they saw the wall of flame that separated their position from the position of their adversaries.

Anguished screams and panicked voices begging help – although most of them were in a foreign language – told Harry and Hermione that some of the prone wizards were unlucky enough to survive the booby trap.

"If they are prone, they cannot cast the flame freezing charm effectively" Al said by way of an explanation when Harry and Hermione looked at him, he smiled and said, "Let's go!"

"I think not" a voice from behind them said.

Harry, Hermione and Al turned their attention towards the source of the voice and their eyes widened when they saw Albus Dumbledore beam into the field in such a way that it reminded everyone of Star Trek.

Suddenly, the air was filled with bullets as everyone concentrated their fire upon the Headmaster of Hogwarts. A shield erupted around Dumbledore at the same moment, shielding him from the fired bullets. Unlike the ones that his subordinates had thrown around themselves, this shield held long enough to drain the magazine capacity of most of the firearms that the bodyguards were carrying.

Al charged forward, his sword suddenly at his right hand. The battle wizard held his sword at his hip in a diagonal position with the tip of

the ninety inch saber pointed to the ground. Upon reaching his target, Al brought the sword up in a classic upward diagonal slash movement, but Dumbledore was also quick and was able to block the blow with a conjured sword.

"I did not think that you could be this violent, Mister York" the Headmaster said.

Al did not reply, instead, he pulled back. Harry and Hermione – and everyone else – watched as the battle wizard spun twice in the air before he landed. By the time that Al's feet touched the ground, he was already holding his wand. Mere milliseconds after his feet touched the ground, Al sent two stunners towards Dumbledore.

Dumbledore deflected the stunners with a wave of his hand and fired his own barrage of curses against Al. The battle wizard was as quick as the headmaster, however, and the curses sallied past Al's head as he evaded in a manner that reminded Harry and Hermione of a matador.

As he spun, Al brought his wand up and when he stopped spinning, Al sent four stunners and a banishing charm towards his adversary. Not satisfied with this, Al charged forward with his sword – again held diagonally with the tip of the blade pointing towards the ground – just right after he sent the curses.

Dumbledore evaded the curse, but he was unprepared for the physical attack. He was at least able to jump out of the way of the slash, but he was not fast enough to completely evade it, as evidenced by the neat cut that appeared on his face that suddenly became red as his blood started to spill.

There was a horrified gasp of shock that came from the assembled wizards who were under the command of Dumbledore. The horrified gasps told Harry and Hermione that the firewall – literally – had subsided.

Two figures charged out of the assembled observers, their wands in their hands and with the intention of helping Dumbledore. Harry and Hermione instantly recognized their former friends Ron and Ginny Weasley and moved to intercept them.

Both Harry and Hermione drew their wands and sent explosive hexes towards the two youngest Weasley children. Both had the presence of mind to jump back when they realized that a curse was on a straight collision course with them and only that action saved them from being decapitated there and then.

Harry ran forward to engage Ron while Hermione sent long-range curses down towards Ginny.

"Think you can take me on Potter?" the red-headed boy asked as Harry appeared in front of him. Ron sent a torture curse towards Harry, but he instantly evaded it and sent his disarming hex towards Ron.

The youngest Weasley boy evaded the hex and thought to taunt Harry a bit, "You can't kill me Harry" he said, "I am your friend, and good old Harry Potter cannot....uuuf"

"You talk too much" Harry said as Ron fell down after being hit by a high power reductor curse that tore a hole in the stomach of the youngest Weasley male. As he surveyed his handiwork, Harry commented, "What made you think that I cannot kill you, Weasley?" he raised his eyebrows and motioned towards the huge hole that used to be the storage room for the food disposing machine that is Ronald Weasley.

The red headed boy moaned in pain and Harry was about to finish off the bastard when he suddenly disappeared. "Damn" Harry said, "Portkey"

For her part, Hermione was raining down long-range – therefore, not really that lethal – curses down at Ginny while the youngest Weasley was forced to dance like a top in order to evade the curses that the Duchess was sending her.

At the same moment that Hermione was raining down those spells, she was also calculating her kill shot. "You can't hit me Granger" Ginny said, "You are just a mudblood, you cannot kill me"

Hermione did not comment, though she did stop firing her curses. Ginny stopped spinning and smiled towards Hermione, "Tired already?" she asked as she brought her wand hand up. She was

about to send a killing curse when she suddenly found herself flying backwards and feeling pain at her torso.

Ginny turned her attention towards Hermione and saw that the older girl stopped casting her spell because her hand now held, instead of her wand, a metal object that Ginny recognized as a gun.

Hermione chambered a fresh round onto the bolt-action Remington R-700 sniper rifle that she used and at the same time, she said, "You're right, next time, I won't resort to magic to kill you, I'll just use guns"

Hermione aimed down the sights of her sniper rifle against Ginny with the intention of ending the red-haired witch – she was already wounded and, like her brother, was missing her stomach – but at the same moment that Hermione pulled the trigger, Ginny disappeared as her emergency portkey activated, saving her life.

Hermione cursed under her breath as her .308 round just hit the ground.

At the same time that they took down Ron and Ginny, Al and Dumbledore continued their duel. Neither was getting the upper hand against the other.

After he landed a blow against Dumbledore, Al attempted to follow up with a thrust, but the Headmaster, despite being shocked by the wound, was able to evade the blow by again jumping back.

Dumbledore sent a torture curse against Al, but the battle wizard, aware of the nature of the curse, just stood there and received the curse. This, however, did not seem to faze Dumbledore as the Headmaster of Hogwarts just sent an organ-expelling curse against the battle wizard.

Al evaded the curse that Dumbledore had sent him by spinning to his right. When he stopped spinning, his wand was back in his hand and he sent four stunners towards Dumbledore, who evaded them at the same time that he mocked Al, "Why don't you call your lightning stunners, Mister York, they might work"

"I've learned a long time ago not to trust a whiskered old man" Al replied with a smile as he evaded another stunner sent by

Dumbledore by spinning once more, this time, to his right. When the battle wizard stopped spinning, he now held his sidearm at his hand and he quickly emptied the twenty round magazine of his sidearm at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore just summoned a shield to deflect the bullets. Al knew that Dumbledore's shield was powerful enough to shield against his bullets, so Al was not really hoping that Dumbledore would be felled by the rounds.

Al just fired his gun so that Dumbledore could be distracted while he ordered his men – Harry and Hermione included – as well as their guests to make a general withdrawal to the direction of the lake.

Dumbledore was not exactly idle as his shield deflected the twenty 9 mm. rounds; he was observing what his opponent was doing. The fact that Al ordered his men to withdraw to the general direction of the black lake had the old man worried.

At that moment, Albus Dumbledore found the reason why Al had insisted on housing his men near the Black Lake – aside from the obvious defensive advantages that they enjoyed early in this fight, of course.

Having realized this, Dumbledore turned towards Al and said, "I congratulate you for keeping that ship hidden even from myself, Mister York, but it would not help you" he snapped his fingers and eight dragons suddenly appeared in the air, "Fire burns wood, Mister York" he commented using a tone of voice that reminded Harry and Hermione of a teacher scolding a young student.

"True" Al replied with a smile, he then pointed his wand towards the air and then sent a spell, "but only if the fire is lit"

"I do not think that you can take down eight dragons on your own, Mister York" Dumbledore commented.

"You'd be surprised what I am capable of Whiskers" Al replied with a smile, he glanced towards Harry and Hermione – who were now with the rest of the men near the Black Lake – and smiled towards them before he turned his attention towards Dumbledore and said, "My mentor told me that when I am in a fight, I should not hold anything back" he paused, taking great joy at the look of confusion

on the face of Albus Dumbledore, "Ever since I've committed the first of my grave sins, I have been holding back," he smiled ironically as he shook his head, "no more" he focused his power on his fifteen inch wand and then cast his most powerful spell, "Expecto Curator"

For a brief few seconds, nothing happened, then a flash of light shot straight towards the sky from the tip of Al's wand. Slowly, this thin strip of pure white light grew in diameter, until it was finally surrounding Al.

Harry and Hermione – as well as the others – watched as Al's wand glowed red for a few moments, before it started to disintegrate.

As the wood surrounding it started to fall away, the core of Al's wand – the hair of a nine-tailed fox that the battle wizard loved – started to make itself known. In short order, the only thing left of the wand – and Al was no longer holding it – was the hair that is floating in mid-air.

Suddenly, the hair disappeared. The white light disappeared and the darkness made itself known once more.

Al stood there with his eyes closed as Dumbledore's face split into a grin, his mirth coming from the fact that he knew that Al had failed the spell which he recognized as the summoning spell for a familiar guardian.

"It appears that you have failed, Mister York" Dumbledore commented.

Al opened his eyes and even Harry and Hermione – who were standing a good fifty feet away from Al – could see that the dark black orbs that were Al's eyes had been replaced by two flaming red orbs that reminded everyone of a fox.

"I would not be so sure, Albus Dumbledore" Al replied. It was the mouth of the battle wizard that moved, and everyone heard the voice of the battle wizard when he said that, but it was not just one voice that said those words, there were two distinct voices, one over the other, that came out from Al's mouth. Without warning, the white light erupted again and a figure appeared behind Al.

As he looked upon the seven feet angel that was floating above Al, Harry realized that she had seen the woman before.

"Veronica" the Duke of Gryffindor commented under his breath.

"A guardian familiar summoning spell?" Hermione asked with confusion evident in her voice. Her eyes widened when she suddenly realized what it meant when Al cast that spell and the spirit of Veronica appeared. "He was..." she began, "He was soul bonded with her"

"We are" Al and the spirit behind him replied. Both smiled and Harry could help but remark – to himself – that the smile that his bodyguard and the guardian spirit floating behind him had were nothing more but logical extensions of each other.

"That is all well and good, Mister York" Dumbledore commented, he snapped a finger and the eight dragons dove as one towards Al. Someone screamed for Al to get out of the way, but the battle wizard just stood there.

The eight dragons opened their mouths to spew forth their flames, but at that moment, Veronica moved. The dragons breathed and fire came out of their mouths towards Al.

Suddenly, however, the fires that came from the stomach of the dragons defied the laws of physics and gravity and turned in mid-air towards the dragons where they came from.

Newt Scamander's book on magical creatures – and every other book on dragons – would tell a First Year student that dragons are not affected by flames. This was widely accepted because dragons are creatures of the fire and to have them affected by flames would mean that they would be roasting themselves after a few months of their lives. Besides, everyone knows that a dragon cleans their wounds using fire.

Those who witnessed what just happened, however, suddenly understood that while those books may have been speaking the truth, they just have never met Alvin York and his familiar before.

The flames that the dragons spewed forth wrapped themselves around the dragons that breathed them. In short order, the dragons

screamed in fury and pain as their very flames roasted them and within a few moments, their burned carcasses fell to the ground with a loud thump each.

"Al!" Harry shouted, but it was too late.

While everyone was busy watching the spectacle that Al had engineered, Albus Dumbledore sneaked towards Al. When he was in range, Dumbledore retrieved a knife from his robes and with all of the power that his body can muster, stabbed Al from behind.

"Let's see you try to survive that, Mister York" the Headmaster said, "That knife is cursed to cause you pain" he informed Al, "the longer that it is in your body, the more painful it becomes, but the moment that you remove it from your body, the killing curse would kill you"

Dumbledore looked dumbfounded, however, a few moments later. Al just stood there, and Dumbledore had fully expected the battle wizard to scream in pain. Al looked at Dumbledore and without warning, his sword streaked through and cut off both of Dumbledore's arms from the elbows before the aged Headmaster can react.

"Impossible" Dumbledore said as he attempted to stop the bleeding of both of the stumps that used to be his arms. He attempted to re-grow his hands using his magic, but found himself blocked, "Impossible" the headmaster muttered again.

"Alberich" Al said, hefting his sword, "is forged by the Goblin Master Forger Dragonbreath, whom I am sure you know personally, Lemon-Drop"

Dumbledore stepped back as soon as he heard that name and everyone can see the horror written upon the face of the Hogwarts' headmaster, "He enchanted the weapon with some of the most ingenious curses known to every creature of the magical world when I informed him that I would use it someday to cut off both of your arms" Al smiled, which confused Dumbledore all the more since Al should be screaming in pain, "In return for promising to cut off your arms, Dragonbreath have ceded the weapon to me and to anyone whom I deem worthy enough in perpetuity"

At that moment, the surface of the Black Lake began to boil. No one among the party of Harry and Hermione noticed, however, as everyone ducked when green light started to rain down upon them from the direction of the towers of Hogwarts.

"Snipers!" Irina screamed as she used her body to cover Hermione. A different guard did the same for Harry.

Al and Dumbledore continued to stare at one another as the killing curse rained down upon them. Several green light curses were sent against Al, but Veronica blocked them all, rendering them harmless.

"We need to take out those towers!" Irina screamed.

At that moment, there were multiple loud explosions coming from the Black Lake. Everyone turned their attention towards the direction of the sounds. Harry and Hermione – and the other students – blinked when they saw a gun-metal gray hull in the lake with several cannons pointed towards the general direction of the castle still smoking, indicating that they had been fired.

"That's no galleon!" Hermione screamed pointing towards the ship, "that's a World War II battleship"

The main cannons and the supplementing smaller cannons – relatively – of the battleship fired again, sending more explosive shells towards the castle. At the same time, armed marines from the battleship swarmed the deck of their battlewagon and opened fire at the general direction of Dumbledore.

Dumbledore, shocked by what he had just witnessed, apparated away, allowing a detached group – operating under Irina's command – to retrieve Al after the battle wizard collapsed.

The battleship turned her guns towards the enemy wizards still on the field and made them aware of just how pissed off she really was while her marines offered covering fire as the ground troops started to evacuate to the battleship.

Notes:

Expecto Patronum in Latin, means 'I expect a protector'

Expecto Curator in Latin, means 'I expect a guardian'

For those interested, Vanquisher is a Vanguard-class battleship.

TWENTY FIVE

Aboard the Vanquisher

Somewhere in Moray Firth, Scotland

A heavy battlewagon cut through the seas as her crew struggled to put as much distance as they could between themselves and the castle that they had just evacuated.

Anxious crewmen manned the anti-aircraft gun mountings of the ship as they scanned the skies while praying that they would never have to test the potency of 40mm. shells against the skins of dragons.

The anti-aircraft gunners scanning the sky, however, were not the only ones who were anxious; it was just that their anxiety was doubled because aside from the fact that they were anxious about being attacked by dragons, they are also anxious – as were the rest of the crew – about the fate of their leader, Alvin York.

The battleship was not fully manned, there was never a need to since it was modified with magic. Instead of the one thousand five hundred men that the Royal Navy needed to man HMS Vanguard in the 1950's, Vanquisher just needed two hundred, and almost exclusively for the weapons systems of the ship.

That gave them plenty of room to house any passengers should the mighty battlewagon ever find itself as a passenger ship, and that was precisely what the Vanquisher found itself to be right now.

Deep within the battleship, Harry, Hermione and their friends sat silently on top of the double-decked bunks that were fitted into the ship for the crew, eagerly and anxiously waiting for any news about Al.

Hermione sat beside her husband, their hands intertwined with one another as they silently stare at one another's eyes. Although they were not using their voice, everyone in the room could tell that they are communicating.

Neville sat with Luna, but unlike the married couple, this couple was just holding hands.

Fred and George were also in the room, as were Susan Bones and her friend, Hannah Abbot. The first two were clearly worried about Al – evidenced by their constant pacing within the ten feet room – while the last two were confused.

Susan was told that her aunt was in trouble – but she was not told what kind of trouble – in order to get her to come with the evacuation team that was sent into the castle to get her.

"I am sure that he will be fine" George – he was the more somber of the two – said, he nudged his brother and said, "Remember he survived that Falklands War and he spent five years as a dark creatures hunter in the East"

"He also kicked Dumbledore's behind" Fred said, agreeing – as usual – with his twin, he added, "And besides, anyone as ugly as Al cannot die, he'd cause a riot in hell"

"I think Irina would disagree with you with how Al looked" Luna said with a smile at her face. It was a tiny smile, but it was enough to bring a smile to the face of everyone – for even Susan and Hannah were somber – in the room.

Harry smiled and was about to say something but at the exact moment he opened his mouth, the door opened and Hec walked into the room. The second-in-command to Alvin York looked as if he had seen hell. He inclined his head towards the guests in the room before he turned his attention towards Harry and Hermione who had looked at him with expectant faces.

"He wishes to speak with you" Hec said, there was no need to say his name because everyone in the room – even Susan and Hannah – were already aware as to who 'he' was.

Harry and Hermione stood up, but they could see with horror the tone of resignation that Hec had used when he spoke with Harry and Hermione. Unable to stop herself, Hermione asked Hec, "Is there...?" she began.

Harry silenced his wife by placing his hand comfortingly over hers. Hermione looked at Harry with worry written on her eyes, but Harry shook his head, silencing his wife without a spoken word.

Hec nodded once, answering Hermione's unasked question. Luna's hand flew to open her mouth as she stared at Hec with an agape expression. Neville comforted her, though it was clear that the pureblood was disturbed by this pronunciation as well.

For once, the Weasley twins had no joke to lighten up the grim atmosphere that had suddenly enveloped everyone in the bunk.

"Let's go" Harry said, gently pulling Hermione towards him.

Outside the room, Hec led them through a maze of hallways, through several flights of stairs lower into the hull of the ships, and finally, to outside a closed door with a red cross painted on the door.

Hec moved to open the door, but he found himself being stopped by Harry when the Duke placed his right hand on Hec's outstretched hand. Hec looked at the Duke just in time to watch as Harry asked, "Is there nothing that we can do for him?"

Hec sighed, "The dagger was a cursed item" he explained, "By rights, the commander should be screaming himself hoarse ever since he got stabbed, but it's nothing compared to the pain that he is suffering every day that he is alive, so he can control himself"

"What if we remove the knife?" Hermione asked as she clung onto her husband as if she was drowning in the sea, "Would that be effective?"

Hec shook his head, "Eventually, we would have to pull the knife out" he replied, "the pain notwithstanding, we cannot heal the wound without removing the knife, but we do know that should we remove the knife, the killing curse, stored in the jewel hilt of the weapon, will kill the commander"

"So what do we do?" Harry asked, desperation in his voice.

Hec shook his head, "The commander" he began, but then hesitated as he amended that to, "Al had decided what to do"

Harry and Hermione blinked and stared at one another for a few moments, before Hermione realized what Hec was trying to say.

She shook her head as she said, "He cannot be thinking about pulling it"

Hec sighed, "I think that it would be for the best if he were to explain his reasoning to you himself, my Lord and Lady" he replied. Saying that, he pushed the door with the red cross opened, revealing the ship's infirmary.

Al was lying on a bed located at the far end of the room, hooked up to some machines and with a packet of blood hanging over his bed and connected to him by means of an intravenous tube.

Irina was hovering over Al, strangely, when Harry and Hermione looked at her face, she was not worried, or horrified, or panicked. In fact, she looked perfectly calm as she slowly caressed Al's hair.

Harry and Hermione approached the bedside and saw that Al's sword was lying horizontally on a table beside him while his gold-chrome pistol was beside it. There was also a strand of white hair beside the sword that Harry and Hermione instantly recognized as the core of his now destroyed wand.

"Harry, Hermione" Al greeted, opening his eyes – for they were closed before – and looking at them with a smile on his face, "Thank you for coming"

"Al" Harry said, "Hec" he inclined his head towards the American, "told us what you wanted to do"

Al laughed silently, "Indeed" he replied, he stopped laughing as he sighed and asked, "And I trust that you want to hear an explanation from me as to why I made that decision?"

Not trusting his voice, Harry nodded. Al sighed and looked at Hermione – who seconded her husband's request by nodding her head as well – before he said, "This is the way that it is supposed to be" before anyone can respond, he continued with a question directed towards Hermione, "I trust that you have been reading about soul bonds since you formed one with Harry?" Hermione nodded – clearly neither she nor Harry trusted their voices right now – and Al continued, "What would have happened if one part of the bond died?"

"There would be pain for the surviving partner" Hermione replied, "the soul bond meant that the couple share their souls, meaning, half of their souls reside in one another, if one of them dies, then the survivor would have lost half his...." She looked at Al with a questioning look, "soul" she finished.

Al smiled, "Correct" he replied, using the tone of voice that reminded Harry and Hermione – somehow – of the times that they had spent in Germany and Potter Island as the battle wizard drilled them in preparation for the year. The battle wizard continued and asked another question, "Do you recognize the spell that I used to destroy the dragons?"

"Expecto Curator" Hermione replied, taken aback by the information that Al had just revealed, "it was a guardian summoning spell"

"You know what happened right?" Al asked with a smile.

This time, Hermione again not trusted her voice so she just nodded. Al continued, "That spell was meant to summon the guardian spirit of a person, everyone has one" he said, "And soul-bonded couples..."

"Would have their partners as their guardians" Hermione said, her eyes widened as she realized what she had just said, or rather, as she realized the implications of what was just said, she looked at Al and asked, "How do you stand the pain?"

Al smiled, "It's always there, a constant reminder of my failures, a constant reminder of my sins" he replied, his smile turned ironic now as he continued, "That is the reason why the torture curse, or any other curse that is supposed to cause you pain, does not affect me"

Al sighed, he looked at Irina and then nodded before he turned his attention back towards Harry and Hermione and continued, "Irina told you that every single person that I made the mistake of falling in love with is dead, and I am sure that you have already made the connection between this curse and my relationship with Nica"

Harry and Hermione nodded, "It was Luna who made the observation" Hermione replied.

"Indeed?" Al asked with delight in his voice, and then he started laughing as he said, "Then you should know that I wish to leave this realm of reality more than anything else"

Harry nodded, realizing that this was true. Hermione followed suit a few moments later, "I understand" she replied, she unconsciously took Harry's hand in hers, "We understand"

Al smiled, "Lesson" he said, his eyes bore straight into the jet black eyes of Harry and the chocolate brown of Hermione, "Being soul-bonded means that the two of you are one, means that should one of you die, the other would follow, and therefore, neither of you must die before time"

"Al..." Harry began.

"The prophecy that we spoke about the first night that we met, Harry" Al began, "the prophecy that is about you and Voldemort, it is done, and I bet that the prophecy sphere in the Department of Mysteries would have turned black by now, but..." he looked exclusively at Harry, "there is another prophecy concerning you"

Before Harry or Hermione could say anything, Al looked at Irina and she nodded towards Al as she said, "They would be made aware of it as soon as possible Al"

"Thank you Irina" Al replied, he closed his eyes and said, "This is the better way out of this mess"

"Al..." Harry began again.

Al opened his eyes, "That same night that we first met Harry, when we spoke about the prophecy, who did I tell you was I related to?" he asked.

Harry blinked, "Professor Trewlany" he replied.

Al nodded, "Correct" Al said, seeing the look on Hermione's face, Al laughed before he continued, "No, I am not a seer, but I..." he smiled, "Like all nine-tailed foxes, Nica can see the future, and when she died, this gift passed onto me, coupled with the fact that I am descended from Cassandra Trewlany, well...." He shook his head as he added sadly, "If I had the courage to kiss her, then this would

have passed onto me during that time, and I would have known what would have happened that night" he shook his head as he removed the regrets from his head, "No" he said, "The time for regrets has long passed, I did what I had to do" he said the last defiantly and toward Harry and Hermione.

"One of yours would have died had I not chosen this route" Al suddenly said, seeing the look on the face of Harry and Hermione, Al added, "No, I am not sure who it is, nor would I want to know who it is in the first place" he sighed and said, "This way, Harry, you grant the wish of a foolish man who wanted death more than anything else while you save a friend who could probably help you in the long run better than I could ever do"

"Al, you are one..." Harry began, but then he shook his head as he came to accept the decision that he had made. He looked at Hermione who was still having a hard time accepting what Al had just said. Harry locked hands with his wife and she finally nodded as Harry subconsciously helped her come to terms with the decision that their teacher had made.

"Good" Al said with a smile, he shook his head as he said, "There is nothing more natural in life than death, Harry, Hermione, it is something that must never be feared, but rather, something that must be understood" he looked at Harry and said, "For someone like me, who has lived his life as a sinner who had yearned for release, dying is actually a favor, something that I look forward to."

"Al" Irina said as one of the machines that was connected to him began to emit a strange loud wailing sound, "It's nearly time"

Al nodded. Harry and Hermione stared at Irina, amazed by the calm that she was showing even as the man that she loves wastes away before her.

Al looked towards Harry and Hermione again and regarded them with a smile, "When I was younger, I used to say, 'I am not afraid of death, what I am afraid of is dying without accomplishing my purpose', and as I look at the two of you, I can say with certainty that I have accomplished that purpose" he nodded once towards them and smiled, "It's time for me to leave this plane of existence and go to the higher plane where all those who loved me and all those whom I love is waiting for me" he looked towards Irina and added,

"And for me to begin what I could only hope would be a long wait for those whom I love and am going to leave behind"

Whatever kind of control that Irina had that had prevented her from crying as Al wasted in front of her was broken by what Al had just said as the tears overwhelmed Irina and fat droplets of her tears started to fall from her beautiful eyes. Unnoticed by anyone but by Al and Irina, her grip on his hands – dying as they were – tightened.

Al gently moved his free hand – his left – towards Irina's face and, using his thumb, he wiped away the tears that are dropping from her eyes before he gently moved the few strands of hair that had managed to obstruct Irina's face to behind her ears.

"You are the last person that I found myself in love with, Irina" Al said. Unknown to everyone else in the room, this was the first time that Al had told Irina that he loved her, though given the fact that Irina had informed everyone about the curse that Al had, everyone could guess that this was the first time, "And I am happy that you will survive me"

Al motioned towards his sword, "Ceded in perpetuity to me in exchange for the deed that I had done against Dumbledore" he began, "I, Alvin Charles York, last of the York family, leave this weapon in the capable and worthy hands of Irina Engels and hope that when the time comes, she will give this weapon to her son, Klaus Engels, so that he may continue the noble office that the York family had held since the beginning of time" he closed his eyes as the sword seemed to glow for a few moments, "So mote it be" he said.

Al started to cough blood as he opened his eyes, "Al" Irina said, this time, she panicked, and looked at Harry and Hermione, "His magic is the only thing that is keeping him from doing that, and it almost already left his body"

"A few other things that need to be done, Irina" Al replied with a smile, though he looked like a vampire when he smiled, seeing that his teeth had been stained by his own blood. The commander of the Potter bodyguards looked towards his second in command and said, "Hector William Boones, by the trust given to me by the Potter family, and as my last act as chief guardian of the Potter family, I do hereby name you, Hector William Boones, as my successor in both name

and magic to continue the noble office of chief guardian of the Potter family" he again closed his eyes as a glow surrounded both him and Hec, "So mote it be".

"So mote it be" Hec echoed.

"One final thing" Al said towards Irina with a smile, he turned his attention towards Harry and Hermione before he said, "As Alvin Charles York, last of the York's, and as my last and final wish, I hereby open the Library of the York family to Harry James Potter and Hermione Jane Granger-Potter and anyone else whom they deem worthy" he looked at the two, "So mote it be"

Harry and Hermione echoed his last words.

The machine was now wailing as loud as a banshee, but now, it was joined by the wailings of several other machines that were connected to Al. With a smile, Al said, "Tell Sirius and Remus that I am sorry that I could not wait for them" and then he turned towards Hermione, "Tell your father, I apologize for not being able to share one more round of his exquisite single malt whiskey with him"

Harry and Hermione nodded and watched – half with horror and half with awe – as Al gripped the jeweled hilt of the knife that was sticking between his ribs, "With this, the last of the York's give his life for a cause that he deemed worthy of spending his life for" he closed his eyes, "evermore and to the last breath, tenacious of justice" so saying, he pulled out the knife, and as the knife was wrenched free from his ribs, everyone in the room heard the battle wizard utter his final words, "Nica"

His body seemed to glow for a few moments, and then the machines stopped wailing, replaced a few moments later by a flat tone as the heart of Alvin Charles York stopped beating.

For a few moments, there was silence as the single strand of hair that Harry and Hermione recognized from his wand glowed again. It was a golden glow, much like the color that they had both seen when they watched the memories of Al and everyone else had gained during their initial bonding.

Out of nowhere, a voice – clear, melodic and sweet, yet so tiny that even though everyone heard it, it still gave the impression that it was

spoken by someone so far away – was heard, "You're late" it said, seemingly coming out of every nook and cranny in the infirmary.

Al's voice was heard next, and it was also tiny "You know that I always come back when I smell your cooking" he said, and then, there was silence save for the flat tone of the machine that monitored Al's heart activity.

The silence – broken only by the flat tone – was then pierced by the wails of Irina as she threw her arms over Al's body.

A few moments later

Harry and Hermione found themselves upon the stern of the battleship, their fingers intertwined as they watched the setting sun as their ship started to make its way eastward.

"I will miss him" Harry said after a few moments.

"We all will" Hermione replied

Neither Potter bothered to wipe away the tears that were flowing down their faces that started but a few moments after they realized that Al was gone.

"Did he really have to die?" Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head, "I don't know" she replied truthfully, "but he went the way that he wanted to go Harry, and he said it himself, that his purpose was accomplished," she looked at her husband and said, "In the end, I think that he is happy the way he went"

Harry nodded; "Yeah" he replied lamely, "I am sure he is"

Hermione understood her husband far better than anyone else, though that was not surprising since they shared their souls, and she knew exactly what he was thinking of when he said that, "This was not your fault Harry, just as Cedric's death wasn't either " she said, talking some sense into her husband, "Al's death was caused by Dumbledore, Cedric's was by Voldemort and we have avenged Cedric, we need to avenge Al, and you will not be able to do it if you will continue to mope around and blame yourself for his death"

Harry nodded, but he was still unconvinced, so Hermione continued, "Do you think Al would have wanted you to blame yourself for his death?" she asked rhetorically, "Do you think he would have wanted you to drop everything that he had asked you to do just because he is no longer around?"

"Hermione..." Harry began; he turned to face his wife, only to find renewed tears upon her eyes.

"I will miss him, Harry, I miss him even now" Hermione replied as she threw her arms around her husband and silently asked him to hold her, "And the others miss him, Sirius, Remus, my father, my mother, Hec, his men, but most of all, Irina"

Harry nodded, "I know" he replied, "I know"

"Don't blame yourself, Harry" Hermione pleaded as she threw her arms over her husband, "Please, don't blame yourself"

Harry nodded, he gently pushed Hermione away at arm's length and said, "You're right" he paused and then added, "You're right, Al would not have wanted me, would not have wanted us, to mope around just because he is no longer with us"

Hermione nodded, "We need to regroup" she suddenly said as her great mind began working again, "We need to tell Sirius and Remus,"

"First, we need to talk with Hec" Harry said, kissing his wife on the lips so that she would shut up and give him the chance to speak, "He is the new commander now"

Hermione nodded, "But we need to do it as soon as possible" Hermione said, "We do not know how many of the Old Man's men have entered the United Kingdom, and we know what he will do next now that Voldemort is gone"

"I am hoping that he would not be made aware of that information until we are ready for him" Harry admitted, remembering the latest intelligence report that Al had given them just two days ago, "but I am not going to be foolish enough to bank my plans on that hope, especially considering that Dumbledore is still powerful enough to wield

influence in the Ministry" he shook his head for emphasis, "I agree with you, love, we must consolidate our camp as soon as possible"

Harry looked defiant as he added, "I would have his head for what he did to Al, and for what he tried to do to us, them and anyone who would dare get in the way"

Hermione nodded, she reached out to her husband. Harry knew what she wanted even without being told, he tilted his head towards her and their foreheads met in the middle. For a brief few seconds, that was enough for the two of them, to just stare and lose themselves in each other's eyes, but after a few moments, it was not enough, Harry removed his forehead from Hermione's as his lips moved towards hers. A few moments later – against the backdrop of the setting sun – Harry and Hermione kissed as their hands held each other.

The battle had just begun.

PS1: There would be a sequel, I just do not know when I would start with it since I am probably going to focus more on my flagship project for the time being. Nevertheless, I would not abandon the wonderful world of Harry Potter fan-fiction anytime soon.

PS2: With this, Project 11A529(Harry Potter: Duke of Gryffindor) is done.